# MEDIAREADER

INTERVIEWS WITH RALPH NADER & JOHN STAUBER
ARTICLES BY JOHN ELLISTON,
AL BURIAN & BILL TODD
ISSSUE TWO

Welcome to the second issue of MediaReader.

• We're moving to Chicago. This will be the final issue released from our home state of North Carolina. The magazine will continue to be released regularly.

• www.MediaReader.org is now up. There you will find all the content of the magazine plus additional information. Individual articles and entire issues are available for download in PDF format (which retains all original design) and on-line reading.

• Music and book reviews have begun with this issue. It was a difficult decision, but I decided that since this magazine is completely dependent on advertising for both printing and postage costs (thus the free price tag), the least that we can do is review the records and books of our advertisers and readership community. If you have music or books you would like us to review, send them to: MediaReader • PO Box 994 • Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

• A *Letters to the Editor* section will begin with the next issue. This section expands most magazines in a thoughtful, critical way. If you would like to write a letter to the editor, address your letter to MediaReader and send it to the post address or info@mediareader.org.

• We're still in search of additional writers. Unfortunately we are not in a position to offer monetary compensation, but if this isn't discouraging, drop us a line. We're interested in truly alternative journalism and thought-provoking, critical interviews. We're more than willing to bounce topic and story ideas back and forth if need be.

• *Subscriptions* are now available. We have two types:
US & Canada
1. Individual Subscriptions are $5 per year (4 issues) ppd.
2. Distributor Subscriptions are $15 per year and get you 75 copies of four consecutive issues. These really help by providing us with a strong, long-standing distributor list.
Overseas
1. Individual Subscriptions are $10 per year in US Funds (4 consecutive issues).
2. Distributor Subscriptions are not available. 50 copies sent Surface Mail (3-6 weeks) cost $10 in US Funds.

# HELP DISTRIBUTE THIS MAGAZINE!

| INDIVIDUALS TAKING LESS THAN 150 | DISTRIBUTORS TAKING MORE THAN 150 | STORES |
|---|---|---|
| 50 copies = $5<br>100+ = $10 | if you're capable of distributing 150+ zines, they will be sent to you free of charge. you must, however, provide us with a phone number or web address so that we can make sure you are 'legit.' | any desired amount of magazines will be sent to you free of charge. you must provide us with your phone #. |

**all orders should be addressed to stickfigure distro . Above rates only apply for usa and canada.**
**stickfigure distribution • po box 55462 • atlanta, ga 30308 • usa • stickfigure@phyte.com**

**ISSUE TWO**
PRESS RUN: 7,000

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**
DAVE LANEY

**COPY EDITOR**
KATE MONAHAN

**ILLUSTRATION**
ROBY NEWTON

**CONTRIBUTORS**
AL BURIAN
JOHN ELLISTON
DEREK JENSEN
BILL TODD

**REVIEWERS**
SEAN HUSICK
DAVE LANEY
ROBY NEWTON

**GENERAL INFORMATION**
INFO@MEDIAREADER.ORG

MEDIAREADER
PO BOX 994
CHAPEL HILL, NC 27514
USA

WWW.MEDIAREADER.ORG

Advertising Information:
1/3 page 5x5 = $50
1/2 page 5x7.5 = $75
full page 7.5x10 = $100

deadline for issue three:
september 15

We can (and prefer to) accept ads in digital format. eps files are best, but jpg, pagemaker, and illustrator also work. if you have questions, get in touch. of course, we also accept flat prints of the ad.

send review material to:
PO BOX 994
CHAPEL HILL, NC 27514

upcoming release dates:
october 15
january 15
april 15
july 15

individual issues of this magazine are available for $1ppd in the usa & canada, $2 overseas

sorry, but issue one is completely gone.

# THE FAKE WORLD: BIG BROTHER AND THE RISE OF QUOTE UNQUOTE REALITY AS QUOTE UNQUOTE ENTERTAINMENT

**BY AL BURIAN**

America, relentlessly crushing the cultural competition around the world in all other arenas, seems to lag behind in the area of game shows. Sweden, for instance, apparently has a game show where you not only stand to win a lot, you also entertain the possibility of losing substan tially. It works like this: in order to participate, contestants must agree to fork over their car, which is then installed into a contraption called the "crusher." Providing they answer various trivia questions correctly, they may stand to win a bundle, but should they totally freeze up and lose their cool (and, with your car in the jaws of the crusher, who wouldn't), well, their car gets reduced to a cube of scrap metal as they look on helplessly and the Scandinavian studio audience hoots its approval. Sweden has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, and you wonder how many contestants go on to jump off buildings or throw themselves in front of subway trains and if there's anyway to televise that. The Japanese also reputedly have us totally whupped in the game show department. From what I hear they have shows where contestants try to climb greased poles over pits filled with alligators. Now *that's* entertainment!

Visiting Germany this spring, you couldn't help but notice the sudden national obsession with a new television program, *Big Brother*. The premise of the program is totally bizarre- basically, it's a game show involving ten contestants, who agree to be locked into an apartment for one hundred days. Every room in the apartment (excluding the bathroom but including the shower, which is separate) is video-monitored and under surveillance twenty-four hours a day. The interactions of the contestants, who are not allowed access to television, radio, or any other media that might connect them to the outside world, are then recorded. The TV show airs nightly, and consists of an edited version of the highlight events of the day. The contestants have no idea what will or will not be aired, but have to assume that anything is fair game. The game show aspect of the whole thing is that the viewing audience gets to "vote" each week on one contestant to eject from the apartment. The last person in there gets a million dollars or whatever the prize is.

The format of *Big Brother* was purchased by a German television channel from a Danish television producer. Apparently this program, or similarly formatted ones, have already aired to phenomenal success in other European countries. The Spanish *Big Brother* was especially good, I'm told, actually the first television program in Spanish history to get better ratings than a soccer game, and all because the contestants started making it with one another on the very first day. I can imagine the voyeuristic appeal of watching someone professing their illicit inter-contestant love in the kitchen and then getting to see them walk out in the hall and make out with someone else. For similar reasons I still often regret not having rigged up cameras in all the rooms in my old house. I suppose the show speaks to that urge on some level.

But, as fucked up and sociopathic as it sounds on paper, when one gets a chance to actually view the program, one is struck immediately by how crushingly boring it is. Part of the problem is that, in selecting their aggregate of cross-sectional average joes and joellettes, the producers have rounded up a group of the most uninteresting, uncharismatic dullards one could possibly imagine. I suppose this is the point, in a way: not to see the already strip-mined-to-the-point-of-tedium "lifestyles of the rich and famous," or Top Ten Secret Hang-Ups of the More Beautiful and Important than You, but to spy on the nose-pickings, door-knob-fumblings and chewing-with-their-mouth-open type activities of the common people, the people so average and just like you and me that everyone can feel a little superior, convinced that we ourselves wouldn't look that bland and socially flaccid, if it were us locked in there, under surveillance, picking our noses and belching

out inane small talk to a bunch of unappealing and badly dressed strangers we'd been incarcerated with.

The *Big Brother* contestant who resonates most in the hearts of Germans is this one particularly hideous fellow named Zlatko (pronounced "Slut-co"). Zlatko, whose main claim to fame is that he's never read a book, becomes a huge celebrity overnight. He's pretty much your grade-A cretin, a big lummox of a man who pontificates pointlessly on any topic which crosses his mind without having the slightest idea of what he's talking about- audiences eat it up. Although not allowed to leave the confines of the apartment or receive word from the outside, the contestants do have a weird kind of window into what's going on in the outside world. They have a back yard that they are allowed to venture into. Fans gather outside the wall separating the yard from reality, to cheer on their favorites or jeer at the girls they consider too bland or bitchy or unfashionable. Zlatko, meandering about the yard, often pauses to savor the roar of the masses.

"Slut-co! Slut-co!" he hears the populace roar.

He grins. "Those are my *fans*," he beams. This is correct. He is unaware that outside those walls his name is synonymous with oaf, and the whole idea of ironic appreciation, that a mass of people can love something based on how much it sucks, a phenomenon familiar to all Americans in the po*st-Dancing Outlaw* age, is not one which he has yet wrapped his mind around. As far as he can tell, what's going on is that he is famous. And, really, in some very basic sense, that is what's going on.

You'd think Zlatko would be a shoo-in for the million dollars. But, strangely, the rules of the game are counter-intuitive: instead of entertainment value equaling longevity, Zlatko's sudden celebrity insures that he is the first ejected from the apartment by 900-number vote. It's as if the populace, in love, can't stand to be without him. Or perhaps they simply haven't learned the other, more boring contestant's names. Zlatko is elected ejected; he emerges on a Saturday into the mob of hysterical fans awaiting him outside. "Slut-co! Slut-co!" they scream, pointing and laughing. He moves regally through the throng, obviously savoring the moment, waving his hand in the slow, semi-circular motion of a beauty pageant contestant. Then he is whisked into a limousine and straight to a recording studio, where he records his first single. A week later it is number one on the German charts, having sold a half zillion copies.

His absence only makes the grating boredom of life in "the most famous apartment in Germany" more acute. Unlike MTV's *The Real World*, where the actors seem grimly determined to milk their moment in the spotlight for all the career they can squeeze out of it, prancing and posing and falling over one another in attempts to be the most noticeable and interesting, *Big Brother* is like watching video footage of a war zone- anything that moves gets annihilated. It is a strange phenomenon. The viewing public seems determined to scour the set of anyone interesting or noteworthy. It's the most populist, democratically controlled television show in history, and the viewing public has spoken: *we want this to be as tedious and boring as possible.* Large-jawed contestant Alex and some woman, I think her name starts with M, begin a tepid and predictable affair. The public goes wild, reveling in sordid footage of them humping timidly under some blankets (on infra-red video), and then ejecting them both from the apartment. One is moved to ponder: what the hell is wrong with you, viewing audience? Can Hollywood and all the other media conglomerates really have it this wrong? You all don't want to see people humping? Verily, there seems to be a concerted movement to rid the program of anything interesting, titillating, or otherwise in the realm of what might be traditionally considered "entertaining." Perhaps the Germans, renown for their overly cerebral cinema and contributions to the field of sociology, really do just want to see the nose-picking, door-knob fumbling and open-mouthed chewing.

I've never been able to quite grasp what it is that people find so compelling about watching people play variants on scrabble or pictionary, even when a gigantic spinner operated by a woman in evening wear is thrown into the mix, but I suppose it is worth noting that the game show ascended to a place of prominence in American culture at the same time as valium. In any case, *Big Brother* and related shows have upped the ante considerably, standing at the forefront of two trends in television entertainment: the game show, now a considerably different beast than when Pat Sajak was first applying in the network mail rooms, and the "reality-entertainment" show, which is the strange newest frontier of lowest common denominators in what variety of flashing lights people will willingly sit in front of and assure themselves that they are not wasting their time.

"Reality-entertainment" is a sort of inverse situationalist theater; a media spectacle which allows the audience to be self-consciously *not* hypnotized by media spectacle. Instead of being an all-consuming distraction and escape from our surroundings, it is characterized by its painful ordinariness and banality. An early example would be *America's Funniest Home Video* and related programs, which became quite popular for a brief period, audiences seeming suddenly insatiable in their urge to see brides trip and fall into the wedding cake, or some guy throw back his fishing rod and accidentally lacerate his drinkin' buddy's jugular vein with the hook. The genre came under fire when it was discovered that the whole premise of these shows- that these were average Americans caught on camera going through the motions of their everyday routine (and narcissistically self-documenting it, of course), and, through random chance, clumsiness, or a vengeful God sending lightning to strike grandpa in the genitals, hilarity ensued- was being compromised, due perhaps to the prize money offered for "funniest video," which was prompting parents to set up elaborate, well-choreographed acts of sadism involving running over pets, whacking their children with oars, or hooking up generators to strike family members with fake lightning. The production values on these faked funny home videos were excellent, but the revelation of their contrivedness ruined the whole oeuvre of the programs- much like the phenomenon of "urban legends," which are astounding when delivered under the pretense that "it happened to a cousin's ex-girlfriend," but which fall apart once the whole "urban legend" concept becomes popularized to the point where, instead of trying to convince you that these far-fetched tales actually might have occurred to a distant relative, people discuss them now with the cold clinical detachment of amateur social scientists. "Have you heard the urban legend about the guy who sticks the toothbrush up his butt?" they ask languidly, as if no longer interested in discussing the actual toothbrush being inserted into the rear but rather how sick it is that people feel the need to talk about putting toothbrushes into their rears. The problem is, these things only work if the illusion of them having happened is maintained. Otherwise, it's just telling jokes that aren't very funny.

Cheaply produced, low-brow programs which follow around and film police while they bludgeon people and kick in doors have been all the rage in the United States for years. Unlike the actors on *Big Brother*, who seem to clam up under constant video-monitoring, the cops on these shows seem to find the cameras surprisingly invigorating, and feel compelled to act out their most excessive Dirty Harry fantasies for the American viewing public, beating the shit out of suspects and then philosophizing brusquely into the camera about it on the drive back to the station. You can practically see the veins in their

temples bulging as they strain their brains to find something profound to say, or at least an appropriately Schwarzennegerian one-liner to growl. "These punks come out here thinking they can flaunt the law," muses officer Rex Ballsmouth, after arresting publicly intoxicated teenagers at the state fair (who, seeing the camera, wave and make absurd faces, yelling, "Hi, mom! Check it out, I'm on 'Cops!') "What they don't realize is, I *am* the law around here." Cut to commercial.

The events depicted on these programs are no doubt in some sense "real," but the people appearing on them are still aware that they have a role to fill and so they act like what they think people on TV should act like. On a show like *Cops* or *Emergency 911*, where the people are overweight and have receding hairlines and mingle and mate with other unattractive people, this attempt at aping the gestures, speech and behavior of actual pre-fabricated television people comes off as occasionally comedic but mostly just intensely depressing.

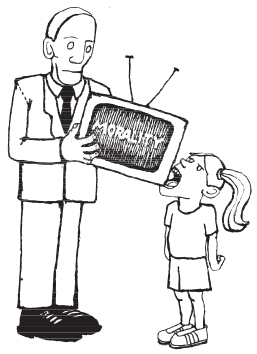
Similarly, MTV's attempt at genre-definition, the *Real World* doesn't so much drag the television format down to the level of unedited, badly lit actual existence, but, as is the general artistic mission of MTV, filters "reality" through a tight filter of carefully pre-selected attractive embryo-celebrities whose actions, although not word-for-word scripted, exactly follow the conventions, plotting, and format of television. The actors speak and move with the fake naturalness of people who know that they are on camera and are comfortable being on camera. Sure, they are "human" in some technical sense, but following their post- *Real World* attempts at careers in the various ignoble branches of the gnarly tree-like growth that is the entertainment industry, as they bare their rumps on dance-a-thons or in *Playboy* magazines, or host variety shows in VFW halls in their hometowns, or become strippers and used car salesmen with their faces plastered on huge billboards by the freeway, advertising "REAL deals from Crazy Larry, YOU KNOW HIM FROM MTV'S *THE REAL WORLD*!" you quickly come to recognize these people as not in any genetic way related to you or me, but rather a part of that other species we share the planet with, whose craft crashed aeons ago in the vicinity of Los Angeles, CA, and on whose home planet everything is flat and two-dimensional and waves of radio-active static float about like tumbleweeds- this strange alien species, now stranded on the planet, finding itself only truly at peace when returned to its natural habitat, the 2-D cathode ray screen.

The game show is, in some sense, "reality programming," not in terms of the situations depicted (but then, cruising around in an ambulance is not a part of most people's everyday routine either, unless you happen to be an ambulance driver), which are insanely contrived, but in that you get to see ordinary, average people thrust into these situations, and watch them react and occasionally crumble into weeping nervous wrecks under the pressure of these inane situations. In the game show we can see one of the primary conceptual principles which allows a show like *Big Brother* to work: people tend to like to watch shows where they can feel superior to the contestants.

The whole premise, after all, the promise implicit in the very title, is that it's you the viewer getting to act the part of *Big Brother*; that it's these poor hapless Winston-Smith rodents in their video-monitored cage being controlled, prodded, and product-placed. Viewers can dig this in the high-tech age of internet and apparent leveling of the trickle-down format for information and entertainment dissemination- people love to talk about the picture of themselves in a Speedo on their homepage as "little brother looking back;" and to a certain extent the sudden explosion of complex networks of information shuffling might be, theoretically, subversive- however, it's hard, once you extrapolate this, to apply it to sitting around and watching people mull over their choice of breakfast cereals. The ironic application of Orwell's dystopian mascot to a television program designed to sell board games, ad space, coffee mugs and etc. all premised on the off-chance that they'll show someone soaping themselves in the shower in an unorthodox way, is a good indicator that things haven't turned out as Orwellianly as predicted. The user-friendly democratic capitalist state cheerfully repackages and sells everything, even dystopia (look at Red Square in New York City, the yuppie apartment complex with statues of good ol' Lenin on the roof, a humorous nod to bygone times when we actually considered the Soviet Union a threat), invasion of privacy and (at least Donahue's working on it) murder by the state. There is no need to control and suppress a populace that lays down and plays dead this easily. We don't need an actual Big Brother watching over us because we'll pay money to watch ourselves do nothing. The future seems to be veering in the inevitable direction of highly popular cable channels offering 24-hour-a-day broadcast feeds of the video cameras at the ATM's around town, tantalizing audiences with the hope of maybe seeing their neighbor taking out a twenty late at night, and maybe catching a glimpse of their balance. In the former East Germany, huge numbers of people were employed by the secret police as informants; no one knew exactly how many until after the collapse of communism, when the files of the State were opened to the public and it was ascertained that fully fifty percent of the population was spying on their neighbors. Orwellian? It seems like the new model does him one better: now almost one hundred percent of Germans are willing to engage in

armchair surveillance, and they're not even getting paid for it anymore, they're being sold a seat in the panopticon under the pretense of "entertainment."

I arrive back in the United States, filled with tales of what those crazy Europeans do for fun, only to find that *Big Brother* has already been licensed from the Danes and a U.S. version is in production. By the time you read this it'll probably already be airing, or maybe even done airing depending on how many quaaludes the printer has access to this time around. You're probably already watching *Survivors*, another Danish formatting import, wherein you get to root for whether you want the aerobics instructor or the homophobic navy SEAL to catch and eat the most rats, thereby assuring that the contestant avoids scurvy and emerges relatively vitamin-deficiency-free to claim the million dollars. Extensive psychological counseling is required of the contestants after appearing on *Survivors*, to prevent a recurrence of the Danish fiasco, wherein one especially unstable specimen emerged from the ordeal a little out of whack and proceeded to track down two of the producers and kill them. I can just imagine the Danish television mogul, in a pool of his own blood in some ergonomic kitchen, thinking contentedly as he passes away that his kids and grandkids will be well-provided for by format licensing. Of course, what they should have done is continue to follow the contestants after they got off the desert Island where they were encouraged by Subway sandwich-eating camera crews to eat those rats, and filmed the revenge act. At the very least, they could televise the therapy sessions. •




# HOW THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE MEDIA DOSE THE PUBLIC'S DRUG WAR SNEAK PITCH

BY JON ELLISTON

Mass media scares of the past have a funny way of cycling back in subtler and more insidious forms.

Take the case of the Clinton administration's drug war propaganda project. It hearkens back to 1957, when a startling technological feat hit the American public like a slap in the face from an invisible hand. James Vicary, a New Jersey marketing specialist, unleashed a technique he called "subliminal projection," flashing too-brief-to-be-seen ads like "Drink Coke" and "Hungry? Eat Popcorn" in the midst of feature films.

Claiming that he achieved a substantial jump in concession sales, Vicary introduced foreboding speculation about the use and abuse of hidden messages: could they brainwash the unsuspecting? His anecdotal evidence seemed to confirm the Big Brother-ish power of messages that go unnoticed by the viewer, yet slip surreptitiously — "beneath the threshold of awareness" — into the subconscious.

Years later, Vicary downplayed the effectiveness of the technique and admitted to *Advertising Age* that his research data on subliminal advertising was "too small to be meaningful." And even today, most cognitive scientists remain unpersuaded that subliminals have an impact on behavior in any fashion similar to what Vicary claimed at first.

But the damage had been done. Subliminals quickly became the stuff of urban legend as people began to wonder, "What do I see that I don't notice, and what can it do to me?" Soon a full-fledged subliminal scare was underway, and Rep. William Dawson, a Republican from Utah, launched a failed drive to ban subliminal broadcasting, which he called the "sneak pitch." (Another commentator called it "phantom plug" and "psychic hucksterism.") In impassioned speeches before Congress, Dawson warned of the "frightening aspects" of the technique. "Put to political propaganda purposes," subliminal persuasion "would be made to order for the establishment and maintenance of a totalitarian government."

The subliminal menace eventually died off, despite continued anxieties about hidden messages that surface from time to time. Now, fast-forward forty years to 1997, when the Clinton administration launched a quiet campaign to lace popular television programs with anti-drug messages, an initiative that stayed under the threshold of public awareness until it was exposed in a January 2000 article by Daniel Forbes in the Web magazine *Salon* (www.salon.com).

This time the device isn't literally subliminal, at least not in the traditional sense — but it is every bit a sneak pitch, and it reaches millions more people than James Vicary ever did.

Forbes details how the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) has been offering financial credits worth millions to TV networks in exchange for program plots that carry anti-drug themes. It's an unprecedented and complicated arrangement, one that has both drug policy officials and network executives insisting that nothing untoward is going on. Sure, the ONDCP is, in effect, sponsoring plotlines that satisfy the government's controversial drug war agenda. Sure, the networks are not notifying viewers that their favorite shows are now conduits for official propaganda themes. But, who can take issue with public financing of anti-drug messages that appear in the medium where kids are most likely to soak them up?

Plenty of people can. Scriptwriters, journalists and media analysts have slammed the drug war TV program since *Salon* broke the story. They say that this form of government intervention in pop culture is so clandestine that it crosses the line into unacceptable propagandizing by the government.

Here's how it works. Back in the fall of 1997, Congress authorized the ONDCP to wage a giant anti-drug ad campaign that would cost $1 billion over the course of five years. The legislation that funded the campaign included an unusual stipulation: the TV networks that ran the ads would be required to run an equivalent portion of ads — a "match" — for free. This way, the government would get a 2-for-1 deal on the ONDCP's ad buys.

Six networks, ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC, the WB and UPN, signed up for the ads, and a torrent of "this is your brain on drugs"-type messages began pouring through the tube. The networks were happy to get on the drug war gravy train, but the match deal started to chafe at them. Those free spots were lost ad time that could have been sold to other paying customers, after all.

The ONDCP, led by anti-drug czar Barry McCaffrey, had a creative (and now controversial) plan to assuage the networks' gripes about the free match ads. "The office would give up some of the precious ad time it had bought — in return for getting anti-drug motifs incorporated within specific prime-time shows," Forbes reported. "That created a new, more potent strain of the anti-drug social engineering the government wanted. And it also allowed the TV networks to resell the ad time at the going rate to IBM, Microsoft or Yahoo."

The networks jumped at the chance to recoup the ad space, and in the spring of 1998, popular programs began receiving match credits for storylines that met the ONDCP strategy to "'denormalize' drug use and accurately portray the negative consequences of drug use," as one White House official put it. The shows included "Beverly Hills 90210," "Chicago Hope," "The Drew Carey Show," "ER," "Seventh Heaven" and "The Smart Guy." According to Forbes, about 130 episodes have been credited for match content thus far, in deals that total about $25 million.

What does this mean to viewers? Well, the last time one of your favorite TV characters overdosed and wound up in the gutter, he or she may have met that sad fate because the network stepped in to craft the content in line with ONDCP's prescription.

"When you get involved in this kind of subterfuge of messing with content, it is a horrifying, scary, overall trend, because the only thing that networks care about is money," said TV writer Merrill Markoe on a CNN program that recently examined the arrangement. "So it opens the door wide to trading for money any type of content."

Here's the scary part: According to Forbes, some network producers actively sought out approval and assistance from the ONDCP contractors that administered the content match valuations. In some cases, TV scripts traveled back and forth between the contractors and the producers as the networks sought to ensure that their programs would be sufficiently anti-drug to garner the match credits.

Here's the scarier part: the print press, which you might think is above this sort of cashing-in on content, is also in on the act. Under a similar arrangement, which Forbes described in a follow-up report for *Salon* in March 2000, publications including *Family Circle*, *Parade*, *Seventeen*, *Sporting News*, *U.S. News & World Report* and *USA Weekend* have likewise submitted articles and editorials for ONDCP ad credits. While some editors have been critical of these match deals, others have said they have no problem with it, so long as the government does not review and approve the material *in advance* of publication.

But even if the drug war credits are doled out in a retroactive evaluation, the government is still offering an unsettling incentive for reporters and editors to address drug policy debates according to ONDCP's criteria. Readers, like the viewers of the TV match content, will be left in the dark about the pay-offs that may have influenced the news and views they see in mainstream publications.

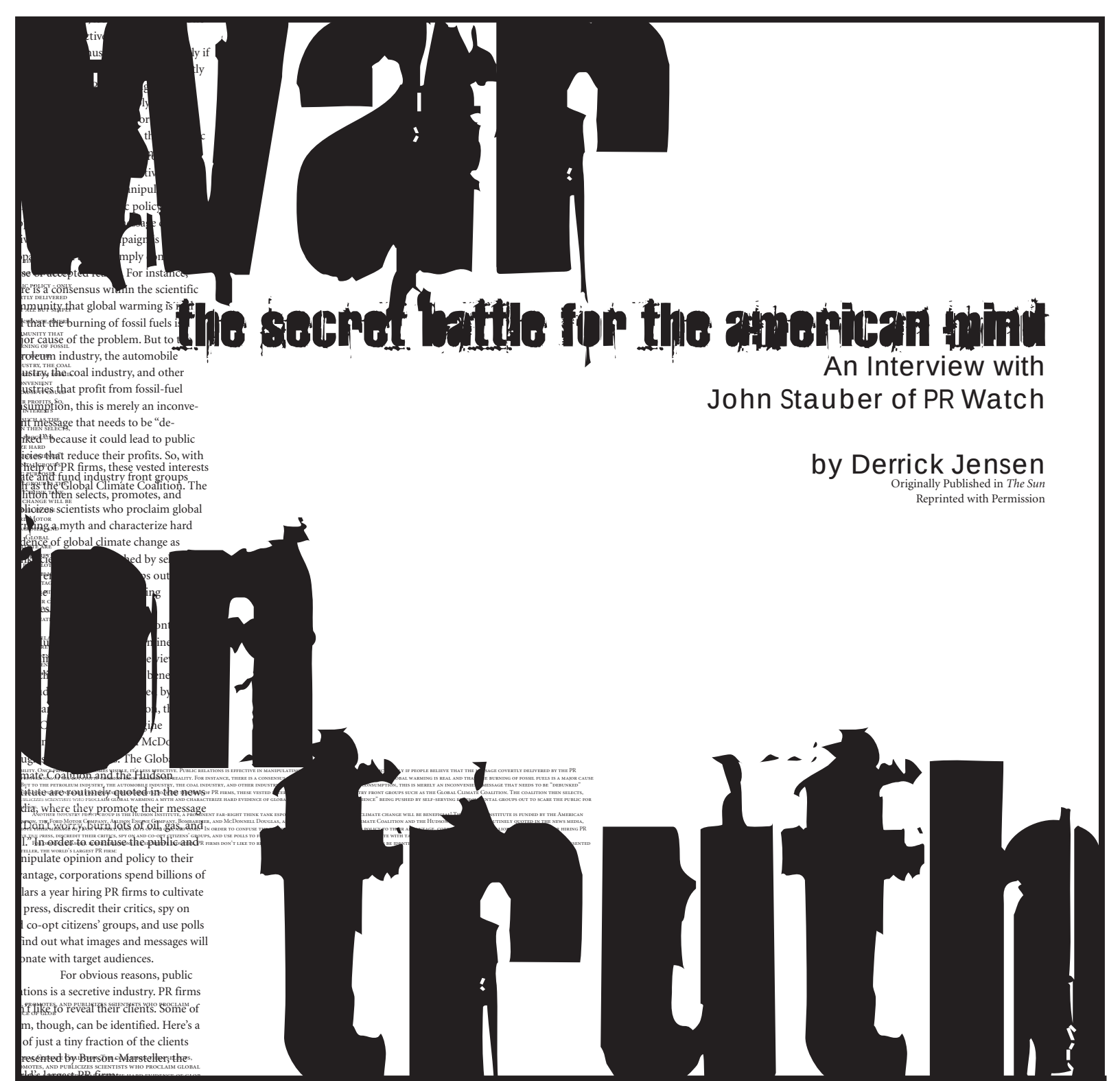
So the drug war sneak pitch is fully underway, and the round of scrutiny sparked by Forbes' reports appears to have done little to stem the ONDCP's zeal to "embed" media themes into program plots and magazine pages. For their part, the major media outlets have shown little inclination to "Just Say No" to government drug warriors pushing credits for content. ■

# the secret battle for the american mind

## An Interview with John Stauber of PR Watch

by Derrick Jensen

Originally Published in *The Sun*
Reprinted with Permission



**Australian academic Alex Carey once wrote that** "the twentieth century has been characterized by three developments of great political importance: the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy."

In societies like ours, corporate propaganda is delivered through advertising and public relations. Most people recognize that advertising is propaganda. We understand that whoever paid for and designed an ad wants us to think or feel a certain way, vote for a certain candidate, or purchase a certain product. Public relations, on the other hand, is much more insidious. Because it's disguised as information, we often don't realize we are being influenced by public relations. But this multi-billion-dollar transnational industry's propaganda campaigns affect our private and public lives every day. PR firms that most people have never heard of - such as Burson-Marsteller, Hill & Knowlton, and Ketchum - are working on behalf of myriad powerful interests, from dictatorships to the cosmetic industry, manipulating public opinion, policy making, and the flow of information.

As editor of the quarterly investigative journal PR Watch, John Stauber exposes how public relations works and helps people to understand it. He hasn't always been a watchdog journalist, though. He worked for more than twenty years as an activist and organizer for various causes: the environment, peace, social justice, neighborhood concerns. Eventually, it dawned on him that public opinion on every issue he cared about was being managed by influential, politically connected PR operatives with nearly limitless budgets. "Public relations is a perversion of the democratic process," he says. "I knew I had to fight it."

In addition to starting PR Watch, Stauber founded the Center for Media and Democracy, the first and only organization dedicated to monitoring and exposing PR propaganda. In 1995, Common Courage Press published a book by Stauber and his colleague Sheldon Rampton titled *Toxic Sludge Is Good for You: Lies, Damn Lies, and the Public Relations Industry*. Their second book, *Mad Cow U.S.A.: Could the Nightmare Happen Here?*, came out in 1997 and examined the public-relations coverup of the risk of mad-cow disease in the U.S.

I interviewed Stauber over dinner at the home he shares with his wife, Laura, in Madison, Wisconsin. He can be reached at: PR Watch, 3318 Gregory St., Madison, WI 53711, (608) 233-3346, or at www.prwatch.org.

# War on Truth

**Jensen:** How is a propaganda war waged?

**Stauber:** The key is invisibility. Once propaganda becomes visible, it's less effective. Public relations is effective in manipulating opinion - and thus public policy - only if people believe that the message covertly delivered by the PR campaign is not propaganda at all but simply common sense or accepted reality. For instance, there is a consensus within the scientific community that global warming is real and that the burning of fossil fuels is a major cause of the problem. But to the petroleum industry, the automobile industry, the coal industry, and other industries that profit from fossil-fuel consumption, this is merely an inconvenient message that needs to be "debunked" because it could lead to public policies that reduce their profits. So, with the help of PR firms, these vested interests create and fund industry front groups such as the Global Climate Coalition. The coalition then selects, promotes, and publicizes scientists who proclaim global warming a myth and characterize hard evidence of global climate change as "junk science" being pushed by self-serving environmental groups out to scare the public for fund-raising purposes.

Another industry front group is the Hudson Institute, a prominent far-right think tank espousing the view that global climate change will be beneficial! The Hudson Institute is funded by the American Trucking Association, the Ford Motor Company, Allison Engine Company, Bombardier, and McDonnell Douglas, among others. The Global Climate Coalition and the Hudson Institute are routinely quoted in the news media, where they promote their message of "Don't worry, burn lots of oil, gas, and coal." In order to confuse the public and manipulate opinion and policy to their advantage, corporations spend billions of dollars a year hiring PR firms to cultivate the press, discredit their critics, spy on and co-opt citizens' groups, and use polls to find out what images and messages will resonate with target audiences.

For obvious reasons, public relations is a secretive industry. PR firms don't like to reveal their clients. Some of them, though, can be identified. Here's a list of just a tiny fraction of the clients represented by Burson-Marsteller, the world's largest PR firm:

NBC, Philip Morris, Trump Enterprises, Jonas Savimbi's UNITA rebels in Angola, Occidental Petroleum, American Airlines, the state of Alaska, Genentech, the Ford Motor Company, the Times Mirror Company, MCI, the National Restaurant Association, Coca-Cola, the British Columbia timber industry, Dow Corning, General Electric, Hydro-Quebec, Monsanto, AT&T, British Telecom, Chevron, DuPont, IBM, Warner-Lambert, Visa, Seagram, SmithKline Beecham, Reebok, Proctor & Gamble, Glaxo, Campbell's Soup, the Olympics, Nestl, Motorola, Gerber, Eli Lilly, Caterpillar, Sears, Beretta, Pfizer, Metropolitan Life, McDonnell Douglas, and the governments of Kenya, Indonesia, Argentina, El Salvador, the Bahamas, Italy, Mexico, Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria.

**Jensen:** That list encompasses everything from biotechnology to genocide to jet-skis.

**Stauber:** In its latest reporting year, Burson-Marsteller claimed more than a quarter of a billion dollars in net fees from its clients. And it's only one of a number of PR firms owned by the Young & Rubicam advertising agency. Other top-ten PR firms include Hill & Knowlton, Shandwick, Porter/Novelli, Fleishman-Hillard, Edelman, and Ketchum - companies that most of us have never heard of, but whose influence we've all felt.

Burson-Marsteller alone has twenty-two hundred PR flacks - that's slang for a public-relations practitioner - in more than thirty countries. In its promotional materials, the firm says its international operations are "linked together electronically and philosophically to deliver a single standard of excellence." It claims that "the role of communications is to manage perceptions which motivate behaviors that create business results," and that its mission is to help clients "manage issues by influencing - in the right combination - public attitude, public perceptions, public behavior, and public policy."

**Jensen:** Why don't we read more about these hidden manipulations in the news?

**Stauber:** Primarily because the mainstream, corporate news media are dependent on public relations. Half of everything in the news actually originates from a PR firm. If you're a lazy journalist, editor, or news director, it's easy to simply regurgitate the dozens of press releases and stories that come in every day for free from PR firms.

Remember, the media's primary source of income is the more than $100 billion a year corporations spend on advertising. The PR firms are owned by advertising agencies, so the same companies that are producing billions of dollars in advertising are the ones pitching stories to the news media, cultivating relationships with reporters, and controlling reporters' access to the executives and companies they represent. In fact, of the 160,000 or so PR flacks in the U.S., maybe a third began their careers as journalists. Who better to manipulate the media than former reporters and editors? Investigative journalist Mark Dowie estimates that professional PR flacks actually outnumber real working journalists in the U.S.

**Jensen:** How does politics figure into this equation?

**Stauber:** Public relations is now inseparable from the business of lobbying, creating public policy, and getting candidates elected to public office. The PR industry just might be the single most powerful political institution in the world. It expropriates and exploits the democratic rights of millions on behalf of big business by fooling the public about the issues.

Unfortunately, there's no easy remedy to the situation. When Sheldon Rampton and I wrote Toxic Sludge Is Good for You, our publisher said, "This book is going to depress readers. You need to offer a solution or they'll feel even more disempowered." But there is no simple solution. Propaganda will always be used by those who can afford it. That's how the powerful maintain control. In defense, the rest of us need to develop our critical-thinking capabilities and maintain a strong commitment to reinvigorating democracy.

**Jensen:** But if it's not illegal and everyone uses it, what's wrong with public relations?

**Stauber:** There's nothing wrong with much of what is done in public relations, like putting out press releases, calling members of the press, arguing a position, or communicating a message. Everyone, myself included, who's trying to get an idea across, market a product, or influence other citizens uses techniques that fit the definition of public relations. After all, the industry grew out of the democratic process of debate and decision making.

Today, however, public relations has become a huge, powerful, hidden medium available only to wealthy individuals, big corporations, governments, and government agencies because of its high cost. And the purpose of these campaigns is not to facilitate democracy or promote social good, but to increase power and profitability for the clients paying the bills. This overall management of public opinion and policy by the few is completely contrary to and destructive of democracy.

In Washington, D.C., issues are no longer simply lobbied. They are "managed" by a triad composed of (1) public-relations experts from firms like Burson-Marsteller; (2) business lobbyists, who bankroll politicians, write legislation, and are often former politicians themselves; and (3) phony grass-roots organizations - I call them "astroturf groups" - that the PR industry has created on behalf of its corporate clients to give the appearance of public support for their agendas.

**Jensen:** How do people in the PR industry respond to these charges?

**Stauber:** In private, their response to me is invariably "You're right, only it's even worse." In public, they say, "What are you, against freedom of speech? Corporations and the wealthy have a right to make their voices heard, and that's what we do. This is just democracy in action."

**Jensen:** But how do they defend promoting the interests of torturers and murderers?

**Stauber:** PR executives compare themselves to lawyers. They say, "People come to us with a need to be represented in the arena of public affairs, and we have an obligation to represent them."

**Jensen**: To lie for them.

**Stauber**: To "manage issues and public perception" is how they would put it.

**Jensen**: How did all this come about?

**Stauber**: The PR industry is a product of the early twentieth century. It grew out of what was then the world's largest propaganda campaign, waged by Woodrow Wilson's administration to get the American public to support U.S. entry into the First World War. At that time, the country was much more isolationist than today. A huge ocean separated us from Europe, and most Americans didn't want to get dragged into what was seen as Europe's war.

In fact, citizens are almost always reluctant to go to war. Take the Persian Gulf War of 1991. We now know that the royal family of Kuwait hired as many as twenty public-relations, law, and lobbying firms in Washington, D.C., to convince Americans to support that war. It paid one PR firm alone, Hill & Knowlton, $10.8 million. Hill & Knowlton set up an astroturf group called Citizens for a Free Kuwait to make it appear as if there were a large grass-roots constituency in support of the war. The firm also produced and distributed dozens of "video news releases" that were aired as news stories by TV stations and networks around the world. It was Hill & Knowlton that arranged the infamous phony Congressional hearing at which the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador, appearing anonymously, falsely testified to having witnessed Iraqi soldiers pulling scores of babies from incubators in a hospital and leaving them to die. Her testimony was a complete fabrication, but everyone from Amnesty International to President George Bush repeated it over and over as proof of Saddam Hussein's evil. Sam Zakhem, a former U.S. ambassador to Bahrain, funneled another $7.7 million into the propaganda campaign through two front groups, the Freedom Task Force and the Coalition for Americans at Risk, to pay for TV and newspaper ads and to keep on payroll a stable of fifty speakers for pro-war rallies.

The Hill & Knowlton executives running the show were Craig Fuller, a close friend and advisor to President Bush, and Frank Mankiewicz - better known as a friend of the Kennedys and former president of National Public Radio - who managed the media masterfully, particularly television: a University of Massachusetts study later showed that the more TV people watched, the fewer facts they actually knew about the situation in the Persian Gulf, and the more they supported the war.

But back to the history of the industry. After the Wilson administration succeeded in getting the public behind World War I, public-relations practitioners who'd been involved in the campaign - like Ivy Lee and Edward Bernays - began looking for business clients. The tactics of invisible persuasion that they'd honed working for the War Department were put to use on behalf of the tobacco, oil, and other industries. And with each success, the public-relations industry grew. Tobacco propaganda has surely been the most successful, longest-running, and deadliest public-relations campaign in history.

**Jensen**: Wasn't Bernays central to that?

**Stauber**: He was, although, to his credit, he later recognized the deadly effects of tobacco and condemned colleagues who worked for tobacco companies.

Edward Bernays was surely one of the most amazing and influential characters of the twentieth century. He was a nephew of Sigmund Freud and helped to popularize Freudianism in the U.S. Later, he used his relation to Freud to promote himself. And from his uncle's psychoanalysis techniques, Bernays developed a scientific method of managing behavior, to which he gave the name "public relations."

Believing that democracy needed wise and hidden manipulators, Bernays was proud to be a propagandist and wrote in his book Propaganda: "If we understand the mechanisms and motives of the group mind, it is now possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without them knowing it." He called this the "engineering of consent" and proposed that "those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. . . . In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons . . . who pull the wires which control the public mind."

It appears not to have dawned on Bernays until the 1930s that his science of propaganda could also be used to subvert democracy and promote fascism. That was when journalist Karl von Weigand told Bernays that Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels had read all of his books, and possessed an even better library on propaganda than Bernays did.

**Jensen**: Let's get back to tobacco. How did that industry use public relations to promote its products?

**Stauber**: Prior to the 1950s, the tobacco industry actually hired doctors to promote tobacco's "health benefits." It calms the nerves, soothes the throat, and keeps you thin, they said. We have Bernays, Ivy Lee, and other early PR experts to thank for that. Then, when major news outlets began reporting tobacco's links to cancer - some publications even curtailed tobacco advertising - the tobacco industry launched what's called a "crisis-management campaign," primarily under the leadership of John Hill of Hill & Knowlton. Hill's goal was to fool the public into believing that the tobacco industry could responsibly and scientifically investigate the issue itself and, if it found a problem, somehow correct it and make tobacco products safe. What really happened, we all know, is that tobacco companies spent hundreds of millions of dollars funding and publicizing "research" purporting to prove tobacco doesn't cause cancer, and at the same time created one of the most powerful political lobbies in history to prevent tobacco regulation.

**Jensen**: This strategy of funding-biased or phony research to support corporate profitability seems ubiquitous: the timber industry funds forestry schools, for example, where they teach that logging is needed to "improve forest health."

**Stauber**: Another proven strategy is polling the public to find what messages will resonate with people's values and desires. If they find, for example, that women have a desire to be free from male domination, the strategy might be to market cigarettes as "torches of liberty," as Bernays did in the twenties, when he arranged for attractive New York City debutantes to walk in the Easter Fashion Parade waving lit cigarettes. That single publicity stunt broke the social taboo against women smoking and doubled the tobacco industry's market overnight.

It's even better if you can put your message in the mouth of someone the public trusts. This is called the "third-party technique" and was also pioneered by Bernays. Surveys show that scientists are widely trusted, so the public-relations industry hires "scientific experts" to say things beneficial to the industry's clients. PR firms also deliver messages through journalists, doctors, and others who appear to be independent, trustworthy sources of information. For example, the public is naturally suspicious when pesticide companies claim their poisonous products are safe. But if former surgeon general C. Everett Koop, one of the nation's most trusted public figures, says pesticides are safe, we're more likely to believe the message. After all, Koop warned us about AIDS and tobacco, so wouldn't he be up-front about pesticides, too? Sadly, no. PR strategists scored a major victory in 1990 when Koop spoke out against Big Green, a referendum that would have regulated or banned many pesticides. His opposition was considered an important factor in the referendum's defeat.

**Jensen**: We ought to remember what's at stake here. What we're really talking about is corporations promoting death for profit.

**Stauber**: The most powerful PR firms, such as Hill & Knowlton and Burson-Marsteller, often work for brutal dictatorships. Most Washington lobbying firms are willing to represent dictatorships.

**Jensen**: How do these people live with themselves?

**Stauber**: Apparently, very well. They have prestigious positions, nice wardrobes, six-figure salaries, and expensive homes. They hobnob with celebrities and politicians and corporate executives. They tell themselves that what they do is beneficial to society, or that if they didn't do it, someone else would. Some PR flacks invoke the Nuremberg defense: "I was just following orders."

I have a friend who was recruited right out of college by a major PR firm. They liked what she'd written about environmental issues, and they said to her, "All you have to do is write, and we'll pay you a nice salary." It was just what she wanted to do, and she was paid much more than most writers. She rose to be a vice-president. Then one day, she woke up in a cold sweat and couldn't go on. She quit and went to work in journalism. But few people opt out the way she did.

**Jensen**: How did you get started doing this sort of work?

**Stauber**: Ironically, I owe my inspiration to Burson-Marsteller, because it was after I caught them infiltrating and spying on a meeting of public-interest activists that I decided to start PR Watch and shine a light on this sordid industry.

In 1990, I organized a meeting of citizen groups opposed to the Monsanto company's genetically engineered bovine growth hormone, called rBGH. Surveys of consumers and

# War on Truth

farmers showed overwhelming opposition to injecting a hormonal drug into cows to force more milk out of them. Unfortunately, thanks to the hundreds of millions of dollars spent by Monsanto on public relations and on influencing the Clinton administration, rBGH was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1993 and is now in wide use. What's worse, milk and dairy products produced with the use of the drug are not labeled, which means consumers have almost no way of avoiding it. Some companies, like Ben & Jerry's and Stonyfield Farm, that have refused to accept milk from cows injected with rBGH have been threatened with legal action by Monsanto. Back in 1990, when rBGH was still just a billion-dollar gleam in Monsanto's corporate eye, I organized a meeting in Washington, D.C., of the Consumers Union, the National Family Farm Coalition, the Humane Farming Association, and other groups. Shortly before the meeting, I received a call from a woman who identified herself as "Lisa Ellis, a member of the Maryland Citizens Consumer Council." She said she'd heard of the meeting and asked if her organization could send a representative; it wanted to make sure schoolchildren could avoid rBGH-produced milk. I said they were certainly welcome, and a woman named Diane Moser attended our meeting.

A few months later, a reporter told me that Monsanto was bragging about having placed a spy in our meeting. A little sleuthing revealed that the Maryland Citizens Consumer Council was a ruse, and that both Diane Moser and Lisa Ellis were working for Burson-Marsteller on the Monsanto account. A former employee of that firm later told me that it routinely sends new employees into deceptive and unethical situations to see if they're willing to be dishonest on behalf of its clients. At the time, though, I'd never heard of such a thing. I felt invaded and swore I would find out what kind of scum went around spying this way. Who was Burson-Marsteller?

Through the Freedom of Information Act, I was able to obtain thousands of pages of internal documents from their PR campaign. I found I was up against one of the largest, most effective, best-funded, best-connected public-relations campaigns in history. Few people even knew the battle was going on, however, because most Americans had never heard of genetically engineered bovine growth hormone. Many of those who did hear about the drug heard about it under a different name. A 1986 survey done for the dairy industry - which has worked hand in hand with Monsanto to promote rBGH - showed that the term "bovine growth hormone" caused consumers to worry, so the industry began calling the drug bovine somatotropin, which is Latin for "growth hormone." Then a PR firm that monitors reporters began giving positive marks to those who called it bovine somatotropin, and negative marks to those who referred to it by its proper name, bovine growth hormone.

**Jensen**: I've seen the same thing happen in logging. Timber-industry and Forest Service representatives try not to use the term "old growth," preferring instead to call ancient trees "overmature" or "decadent." There are also a number of euphemisms for clear-cuts; my favorite is "temporary meadows."

**Stauber**: If you can control the terms of the debate, you'll win every time. If you read something about bovine somatotropin, a "natural protein" used to enhance yields in dairy farming, your response will likely be more positive than if you read about injecting dairy cows with a genetically engineered growth hormone.

**Jensen**: How do PR firms get away with planting these terms in news stories?

**Stauber**: Journalism is in drastic decline. It's become a lousy profession. The commercial media are greed-driven enterprises dominated by a dozen transnational companies. Newsroom staffs have been downsized. Much of what you see on national and local TV news is actually video news releases prepared by public-relations firms and given free to TV stations and networks. News directors air these PR puff pieces disguised as news stories because it's a free way to fill air time and allows them to lay off reporters. Of course, it's not just television that's the problem. Academics who study public relations report that half or more of what appears in newspapers and magazines is lifted verbatim from press releases generated by public-relations firms.

**Jensen**: That doesn't surprise me. But maybe I'm just cynical.

**Stauber**: Frankly, if you're not cynical, you're not understanding what's happening. The reality is that the wheels of media are greased with more than $100 billion a year in corporate advertising. The advertisers' power to dictate the content of what we see as news and entertainment grows every year. After all, the real purpose of the media as a business is to deliver an audience to advertisers. Journalists find themselves squeezed between advertising money coming in the back door and press releases coming in the front.

Not only this, they've become dependent on PR firms for the stories they do write. All journalists know, if you want to investigate a corporation, you eventually have to talk with someone there. Unless you belong to the same country club as the top executives, you're going to pick up the phone and get the "vice-president of communications" - i.e., a public-relations flack. You need this person's help. This probably isn't the last story you'll do on this corporation. If you write a hard-hitting piece, no one at that corporation will ever speak to you again. What's that going to do to your ability to write about that industry? What's it going to do to your career?

Some PR companies - such as Carma International and Video Monitoring Service - specialize in monitoring news stories and journalists. They can immediately evaluate all print, radio, and television coverage of a subject to determine which stories were favorable to corporate interests, who the reporters were, who their bosses are, and so on. The PR firms then rank reporters as favorable or unfavorable to their clients' interests, and cultivate relationships with cooperative reporters while punishing those whose reporting is critical. Certain PR firms will provide dossiers on reporters so that, between the time a reporter makes an initial phone call and the time a company's vice-president of communications calls back, the company will have found out the name of the reporter's supervisor, all about the reporter's family and background, and other pertinent information.

**Jensen**: We often hear charitable giving referred to as "good public relations." How does this work?

**Stauber**: Corporations want us to believe that they are concerned, moral "corporate citizens" - whatever that means. So businesses pump millions of dollars into charities and nonprofit organizations to deceive us into thinking that they care and are making things better. On top of that, corporate charity can buy the tacit cooperation of organizations that might otherwise be expected to criticize corporate policies. Some PR firms specialize in helping corporations to defeat activists, and co-optation is one of their tools.

Some years ago, in a speech to clients in the cattle industry, Ron Duchin, senior vice-president of the PR firm Mongoven, Biscoe, and Duchin (which represents probably a quarter of the largest corporations in the world), outlined his firm's basic divide-and-conquer strategy for defeating any social-change movement. Activists, he explained, fall into three basic categories: radicals, idealists, and realists. The first step in his strategy is to isolate and marginalize the radicals. They're the ones who see the inherent structural problems that need remedying if indeed a particular change is to occur. To isolate them, PR firms will try to create a perception in the public mind that people advocating fundamental solutions are terrorists, extremists, fearmongers, outsiders, communists, or whatever. After marginalizing the radicals, the PR firm then identifies and "educates" the idealists - concerned and sympathetic members of the public - by convincing them that the changes advocated by the radicals would hurt people. The goal is to sour the idealists on the idea of working with the radicals, and instead get them working with the realists.

Realists, according to Duchin, are people who want reform but don't really want to upset the status quo; big public-interest organizations that rely on foundation grants and corporate contributions are a prime example. With the correct handling, Duchin says, realists can be counted on to cut a deal with industry that can be touted as a "win-win" solution, but that is actually an industry victory.

**Jensen**: Why does this strategy keep working?

Structural reforms must be made in our political and economic system in order to assert the rights of citizens over corporations. But since big corporations dominate the media, we're not going to hear about this on network news or in the New York Times. We're not going to hear about it from politicians who are bought and paid for by wealthy interests. The beginning of the solution is for people to recognize that it's not enough to send checks in response to direct-mail solicitations from politicians and public-interest groups. We need to become real citizens and get personally involved in reclaiming our country.

# War on Truth

**Stauber**: In part, because we don't have a watchdog press that aggressively investigates and exposes PR lies and deceptions. Its success is also a reflection of the sorry state of democracy in our society. We really have a single corporate party with two wings, both funded by wealthy special interests. On the critical issues - taxation, health care, foreign policy - there's rarely much disagreement. If there is, more special-interest money floods in to make sure the corporate agenda wins out. On a deeper level, we all want to believe these lies. Wouldn't it be great to wake up and find ourselves living in a functioning democracy? To be truly represented by our so-called Representatives? Not to have to worry about the destruction of the biosphere or the safety of the water we drink and the food we eat? I think we all buy in because we want to believe things aren't as bad as they really are.

The reality is, though, that the U.S. political and social environment is corrupt and deeply dysfunctional. Structural reforms must be made in our political and economic system in order to assert the rights of citizens over corporations. But since big corporations dominate the media, we're not going to hear about this on network news or in the New York Times. We're not going to hear about it from politicians who are bought and paid for by wealthy interests. The beginning of the solution is for people to recognize that it's not enough to send checks in response to direct-mail solicitations from politicians and public-interest groups. We need to become real citizens and get personally involved in reclaiming our country.

Big environmental organizations, socially responsible investment funds, and other groups perpetuate the myth that if we just write checks to them, they'll heal the environment, reform the corrupt campaign-finance system, protect our freedom of speech, and reign in corporate power. This is a dangerous falsehood, because it implies that we don't have to sweat and struggle to make democracy work. It's so much easier to write a check for twenty-five or fifty dollars than it is to integrate our concerns about critical issues into our daily lives and organize with our neighbors for democracy.

Many so-called public-interest organizations have become big businesses, multinational nonprofit corporations. The PR industry knows this and exploits it well with the type of co-optation strategies that Duchin recommends.

**Jensen**: This seems especially true of big environmental groups.

**Stauber**: E. Bruce Harrison, one of the most effective public-relations practitioners in the business, knows that all too well. He's made a lucrative career out of helping polluting companies defeat environmental regulations while simultaneously giving the companies a "green" public image. In the industry, they call him the "Dean of Green." As a longtime opponent of the environmental movement, Harrison has developed some interesting insights into its failures. He says, "The environmental movement is dead. It really died in the last fifteen years, from success." I think he's correct. What he means is that, in the eighties and nineties, environmentalism became a big business, and organizations like the Audubon Society, the Wilderness Society, the National Wildlife Federation, the Environmental Defense Fund, and the Natural Resources Defense Council became competing multi-million-dollar bureaucracies. These organizations, Harrison says, seem much more interested in "the business of greening" than in fighting for fundamental social change. He points out, for instance, that the Environmental Defense Fund (whose executive director makes a quarter of a million dollars a year) sat down and cut a deal with McDonald's that was probably worth hundreds of millions of dollars in publicity to the fast-food giant, because it helped to "greenwash" its public image.

**Jensen**: How so?

**Stauber**: After years of being hammered by grass-roots environmentalists for everything from deforestation to inhumane farming practices to contributing to a throwaway culture, McDonald's finally relented on something: it did away with its styrofoam clamshell hamburger containers. But before the company did this, it entered into a partnership with the Environmental Defense Fund and gave that group credit for the change. Both sides "won" in the ensuing PR lovefest. McDonald's took one little step in response to grass-roots activists, and the Environmental Defense Fund claimed a major victory.

Another problem is that big green groups have virtually no accountability to the many thousands of individuals who provide them with money. Meanwhile, the grass-roots environmental groups are starved of the hundreds of millions of dollars that are raised every year by these massive bureaucracies. Over the past two decades, they've turned the environmental movement's grass-roots base of support into little more than a list of donors they hustle for money via direct-mail appeals and telemarketing.

It's getting even worse, because now corporations are directly funding groups like the Audubon Society, the Wilderness Society, and the National Wildlife Federation. Corporate executives now sit on the boards of some of these groups. PR executive Leslie Dach, for instance, of the rabidly anti-environmental Edelman PR firm, is on the Audubon Society's board of directors. Meanwhile, his PR firm has helped lead the "wise use" assault on environmental regulation.

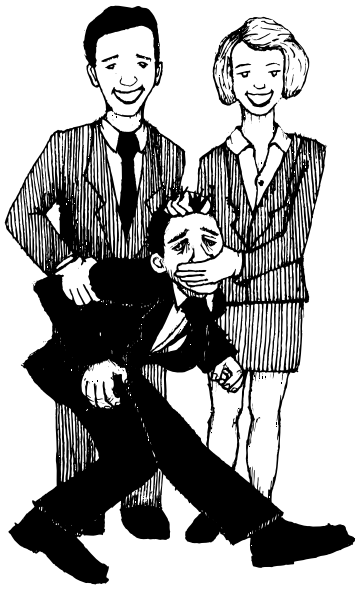
Corporations and public-relations firms hire so-called activists and pay them large fees to work against the public interest. For instance, Carol Tucker Foreman was once the executive director of the Consumer Federation of America, a group that itself takes corporate dollars. Now she has her own lucrative consulting firm and works for companies like Monsanto and Proctor & Gamble, pushing rBGH and promoting the fake fat Olestra, which has been linked to bowel problems. She also works with other public-interest pretenders like the Washington, D.C.-based organization Public Voice, which takes money from agribusiness and food interests and should truthfully be called Corporate Voice.

**Jensen**: It seems the main thrust of the PR business is to get the public to ignore atrocities.

**Stauber**: Tom Buckmaster, the chairman of Hill & Knowlton, once stated explicitly the single most important rule of public relations: "Managing the outrage is more important than managing the hazard." From a corporate perspective, that's absolutely right. A hazard isn't a problem if you're making money off it. It's only when the public becomes aware and active that you have a problem, or, rather, a PR crisis in need of management.

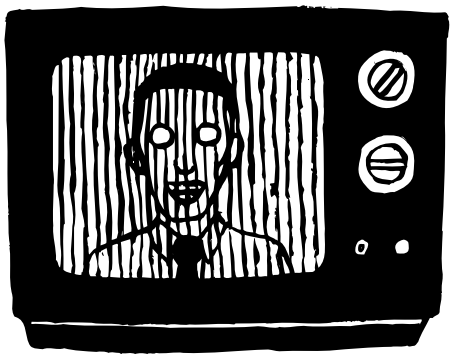
**Jensen**: How does your work at PR Watch help?

**Stauber**: The propaganda-for-hire industry perverts democracy. We try to help citizens and journalists learn about how they're being lied to, manipulated, and too often defeated by sophisticated PR campaigns. The public-relations industry is a little like the invisible man in that old Claude Rains movie: crimes are committed, but no one can see the perpetrator. At PR Watch, we try to paint the invisible manipulators with bright orange paint. Citizens in a democracy need to know who and what interests are manipulating public opinion and policy, and how. Democracies work best without invisible men.



**Derrick Jensen's newest book is *A Language Older Than Words*, published by Context Books. Derrick's website is http://home.earthlink.net/~dbjensen1/**

BY AL BURIAN



# THIS LETHAL INJECTION BROUGHT TO YOU BY NABISCO

I've never been on the set of a television program, but I have been on location for the execution of a death row inmate, in Raleigh, North Carolina. Strangely enough, Phil Donahue was also there. As time ran out for the convicted felon, time was also running out for Mr. Donahue, who scurried about from warden to lawyer to bored camera crew, attempting, up until the final moments, to procure permission to film and later televise the execution. Outside the prison, death penalty protestors held candles and waited in the evening drizzle, caught up in prayer or quiet reflection. Across the street, death penalty supporters were having cook-outs, popping champagne corks, loudly singing, "na-na-na-na, hey hey, good bye," and screaming, "We'd put Bill Clinton in the gas chamber too, but HE DON'T INHALE!" Had both sides of the street been polled on their opinions of Phil Donahue's attempted televising of the event which everyone was gathered here to commemorate in some way, the public sentiment would have been unanimous. Sure, televise the execution. Donahue's motivations for trying to procure the rights to do this might be self-serving and crass, a morbidly opportunistic attempt to boost ratings through the exploitation and objectification of another human being's murder, and his self-justifying squawks on behalf of freedom of the press and the public's right to know might seem transparent and cynically contrived, but on the other hand, transparent or not, what about freedom of the press and the public's right to know? The death-penalty opponents might hope that actually seeing what it is that the state is doing to real people would shock and galvanize the public, and that the general fence-sitting talk show audience would be moved to join them during the next drizzly vigil. The pro-death set would just want front row seats; they'd be delighted to grill hot dogs over the electric-chair-charred body.

Personal politics notwithstanding, there is a broad cultural consensus that TV makes things more real. "The right to know:" my earliest memories of television are of Walter Kronkite, with his white mustache and crinkly eyes, whose face I transposed into the face of God whenever as a child I imagined heaven and the good Lord staring benevolently down upon me, crinkling up his eyes with understanding and universal concern (except that in my imagined heaven, he wore a toga, not a rumpled three piece suit). Walter Kronkite's luminescent head was propped up by the dinner table, his eyes at eye level with my own, making him a de facto family member, although he rarely got a plate and never asked for seconds on potatoes. Kronkite dominated the conversation, delivering in monologue that day's events, never once pausing to ask me how my day in pre-school had been. The family sat rapt with attention: in all fairness, nothing that earth shattering ever happened in pre-school, and Kronkite, earnest and even-toned, seemed to have something really serious and important to say every night.

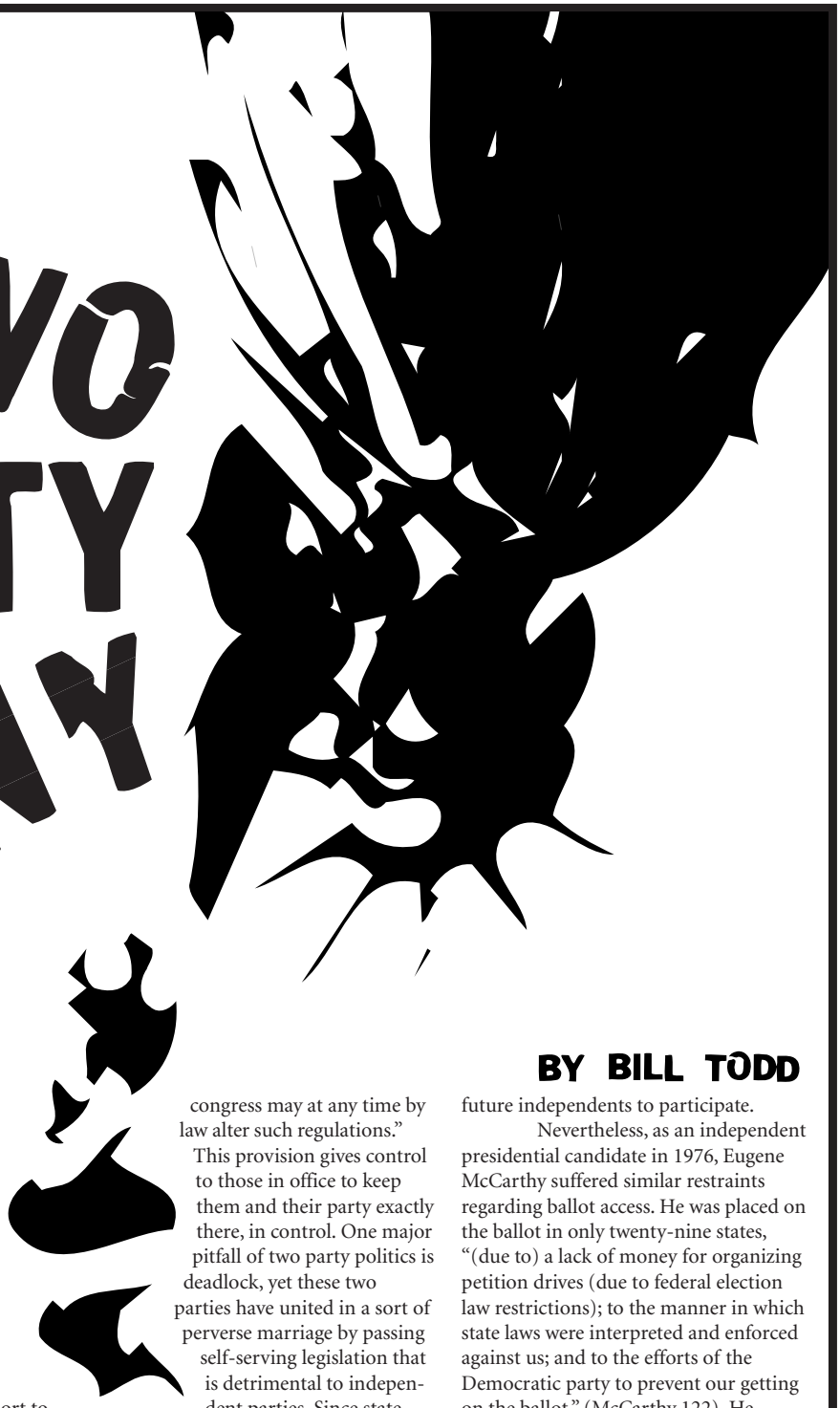
What I was unaware of, being too young to understand, was that history was being made in my dining room on those evenings. Both real history and television history- no, actually, something more profound than that: what was going on was that history and television history, in occurring simultaneously, were becoming inseparable and indistinguishable. My parents, like pretty much everyone else in the U.S, were watching televised footage of the Viet Nam war, a war that television made seem very "real;" not only were people sending their loved ones off to do combat in a foreign place, they stood a chance of seeing that loved one (or a similar terrified, mud-soaked kid, whom they could easily extrapolate into their own), covered in his own blood, weeping, killing an enemy soldier in cold blood. It was a little too "real." Television became not only a reflection or documentation of what was going on in the world- it informed and influenced public opinion, transforming itself from a piece of high-tech furniture into a sentient historical actor, changing the course of actual events. Walter Kronkite was, almost literally, a "real" person at dinner tables all across America, not just feeding off of the world outside the box but shaping it.

But TV is not real, it is a cathode-ray simulation of the real. As we've bought in to the simulation as our sphere of discourse, we've lost the ability to have the conversation out here, where we live, in the 3-D real time of our actual lives. The profound power of the medium might have stirred hopes, initially, that it would act as a democratizing force in society: look at how it influenced the public's perception of the war, look at how it shaped and changed political discussion and debate, where now suddenly politicians with bad on-screen presence could be more easily identified as "weak" and "evil." The next war, in the Persian Gulf, was better television and far more deficient reality; nice graphics, good pacing and suspenseful buildups to climactic explosion-sequences, some exciting major characters and minor love interests. No blood, no mass incineration of civilians on crowded highways or trenches full of Iraqui soldiers being buried with US bulldozers. The high ratings of Viet Nam without the uncomfortable ethical implications, and without the ensuing social strife. The inherent error in putting faith into technology to manufacture some assembly-line egalitarianism is that technology, as a rule, does not democratize, it just shifts power into the hands of those who control the technology. Those hands seem to remain depressingly the same.

I feel that I've got a (reasonably good) grip on reality, and, from my vantage point, I can say that what we're living in currently is not it. Political protests occur and the organizers are less concerned with actual numbers of attendees than with arranging them so that it looks like an infinite swarming mass for the cameras. The actual numbers can always be fudged later by some spokesperson at a press conference. What is important is not that the people involved feel some sense of empowerment or that the cronies in the government building we're marching by peep out from behind their French-revolution-era velveteen curtains and feel a chill go down their spines at witnessing the assembled might of the perturbed population; all that matters is getting that precious few seconds of "air time." We rush home from our protest or the talent show or the rodeo we won first prize for cow-jacking in, and if we don't catch a momentary glimpse of ourselves on the evening news, wedged between an old lady's cat stuck in a tree and the guy who's been making pretzels shaped like presidents since 1936, we feel that it didn't really happen, that we don't exist.

In the media, the rules change with stunning, fiber-optic speed; in the sluggish and sentimental synapses of the human brain, though, it's still 1950 and the old reliable black and white RCA is just fine, thanks. At the death penalty protest the terms of debate are stuck in the Kronkitian era of a simple information-debate-progress loop. Thus the protestors, remembering the horrified silence at the dinner table, believe in the transformative, morally leveling power of media to influence people to believe in the "right" things if they are only exposed to the "truth." The warden, freaking out about this Phil Donahue fellow with all his cameras and microphones and inherently suspicious nasal yankee accent- the warden being himself, perhaps, a Viet Nam vet and remembering how it was guys like this that lost the war on the home front, who incited busloads of hippies to come spit on him when he returned from battle- staunchly refuses to let Donahue into the execution chamber with all his gear. And both the warden and the protestors are completely wrong. What they fail to take into account is that this symbiosis of history and television history is not some sort of "your chocolate in my peanut butter" scenario. It's more like matter and anti-matter: in the synthesis of something real and something fake, one or the other had to lose out. Fake won. ■

# TWO PARTY TYRANNY



BY BILL TODD

Once again conservative and liberal pundits are back to battle it out in the media, attempting to advance their respective candidates to the podium. The odd thing is that their heroes are becoming much more similar every election. Their main differentiation has become how quickly and to which corporate suitors they succumb. The scourge of these Republicrats are the independent and third party candidates. With two notable alternative candidates, Ralph Nader and Pat Buchanan, stirring up the current election, we are being forced to examine the pitfalls of a bipartisan democratic society. Although we will assuredly be forced to capitulate to one of the bipartisan evils, these independent candidates will force the big players to work harder for votes that they once took for granted, and might just be the reason why one of them loses to their foe.

Nader and Buchanan have both earned their right of candidacy and have arguably better debate skills than their major party nemeses, potentially raising the level of presidential election coverage and public interest. Nader, disgusted by the direction that the Democratic Party has taken, says he intends to give them a "four year cold shower" with his election run. Buchanan, recently departed from the Republican Party, is committed to reformists and other voters ill-represented by the Republicans and George Bush, Jr. Despite recent polls which show that one in eight voters wants one of these two candidates to be elected, they are still shunned by major media as well as by the Federal Election Commission (F.E.C.).

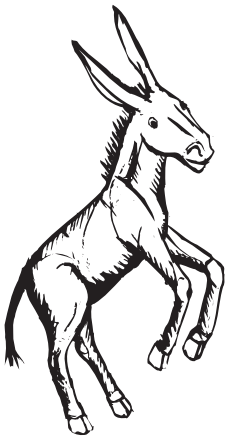
Our society is governed by the consent of its constituents, who in turn must lend their support to candidates and political parties. In theory, these parties exist to promote the peoples' ideologies by offering them a choice of candidates who represent these beliefs. The past century's domination by the Republican and Democratic parties begs the question: does this situation truly reflect the popular ideology? Or is it the case that those in office have manipulated the system to ensure that only the two major parties can continue their reign of power?

The Founding Fathers, careful in writing the Constitution so as to prevent the government from being dominated by one interest, seem to have underestimated the power of political parties. As decreed in the Constitution, the "times, places and manner of holding elections... shall be prescribed in each state by the legislature thereof; but the congress may at any time by law alter such regulations." This provision gives control to those in office to keep them and their party exactly there, in control. One major pitfall of two party politics is deadlock, yet these two parties have united in a sort of perverse marriage by passing self-serving legislation that is detrimental to independent parties. Since state and federal legislatures are dominated by the two parties, independents are left impotent in these matters.

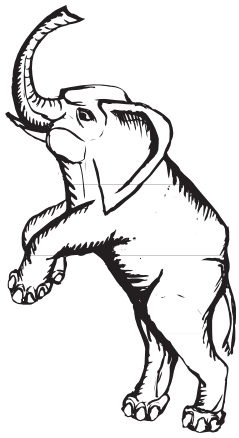
This disparity of power was evidenced in the early twentieth century. "By the mid 1920s, ballot laws were weighted in favor of preserving the existing major parties." (Mazmanian 92) By the 1940s, several states specifically excluded the communist party or any party affiliated with it from entering candidates into elections. In 1948, legislation was introduced into Congress, "designed to specifically exclude (presidential candidate) Henry Wallace and the Progressive Party." (Mazmanian 93) Although it did not pass, Wallace still encountered cumbersome ballot access restrictions. He retaliated, and eventually forced the revision of some laws, making it somewhat easier for future independents to participate.

Nevertheless, as an independent presidential candidate in 1976, Eugene McCarthy suffered similar restraints regarding ballot access. He was placed on the ballot in only twenty-nine states, "(due to) a lack of money for organizing petition drives (due to federal election law restrictions); to the manner in which state laws were interpreted and enforced against us; and to the efforts of the Democratic party to prevent our getting on the ballot." (McCarthy 122) He encountered ridiculous petition requirements, and even laws completely forbidding independent candidates. In all, it was necessary for McCarthy to file eighteen suits against states before he was allowed on the ballot. This time consuming and financially draining effort put him at a strong disadvantage, and even when the courts affirmed his position, the damage inflicted by the bureaucracy proved irreversible. All this despite the fact that the Supreme Court set precedent in 1974 when it ruled that candidates must not be forced to join a political party in order to be on the ballot, recognizing that an integral part of an independent candidate's message is freedom from partisan ties.

In this year's election, Nader expects to be on the ballot in every state except North Carolina, where he has



...in Europe, approximately half the population votes for one of the reformist labor-based parties: socialist, labor, communist. This is roughly equal to the number of people that don't vote in the U.S. each election.



filed suit against the state to gain ballot access. Nader failed to meet the state's requirement of getting over 51,000 supporting signatures before June first of the election year, a requirement that exceeds that of most states, and is seen by Nader as a rule designed to limit access for alternative candidates.

Partisan bias does not exist in law alone; examination of the mass media reveals a severe lack of coverage given to alternative candidates. A recent poll suggests that two-thirds of the American people depend primarily on television as their news source. The fact that television is the most closely regulated form of media, and that this regulation comes from the FCC (which is controlled by Congress) creates legitimate suspicion about the fairness and accuracy of information presented on television. Contrary to the idea that "Congress shall make no laws abridging the freedom of the press," Congress and the courts have not given televised media the same liberty that the print media has received. Such regulations as the "equal-time clause," the now-defunct "fairness doctrine," and the "personal attack rule" were established to ensure fairness, but these rules have been manipulated by politicians and broadcasters so that only certain voices of opposition may be heard. For example, the equal-time clause, originally created to provide all legal candidates for office equal access to television exposure, was later limited to provide this privilege to only the two major parties. (Powe 158) Congress and the FCC have, when legislating, "blatantly used section 315 (the equal-time clause) to bolster the position of those already holding political office," (Powe 154) demonstrating how incumbents misuse their power to keep themselves in office, and to keep independent candidates at a serious disadvantage.

To add to the problem, broadcasters are also given the privilege of deciding what type of issue-oriented advertising they will show on their networks. In the 1969 case of Red Lion v. the FCC, the Supreme Court decided that "the right of the viewer was paramount." (Powe 146) But when a broadcaster was urged to air an anti-war ad shortly after the ruling, the FCC ruled that "if broadcasters did not want a group's money or ideas, they do not have to accept it." (Powe 146) This ruling essentially negated the Supreme Court's ruling, leaving the door wide open for broadcasters to deny political parties (or any other group) airwave access.

Now, it seems, it is in the hands of the broadcasters to determine what is a fair debate. They decide who may speak for the right and the left, and by presenting these debates as "fair," they create an artificial atmosphere in which the hand-selected participants embody the only two sides of the issue. This disguises the fact that the underexposed alternative parties may hold views or raise issues that are beyond, contrary to, or just completely ignored by the two major parties.

In the upcoming election, according to current Federal Election Commission standards, Nader and Buchanan won't be eligible to be in the debates unless they garner a minimum fifteen percent poll in at least five national polls. This is a huge hurdle for any independent candidate, since the debates are a major way for them to prove themselves and gain votes. In 1992, Ross Perot spent millions on self-promotion and was able to participate in the debates. He won nineteen percent of the vote on Election Day. In contrast, during his 1996 campaign he was not allowed to join in the debates and won only eight percent. Jesse Ventura's 1998 run for governor in Minnesota was considered a joke by the two major party candidates and by the media. But when his inclusion in the televised debates showcased a "shoot from the hip" mentality that seemed fresh and honest, the voters turned out in record numbers to elect him.

Nader's request to be included in the debates has been largely ignored by the F.E.C., who have retorted that it is not their role to "jump-start (his) campaign and all of a sudden make (him) competitive." They seem to think that anyone polling less than fifteen percent doesn't have a realistic shot at the presidency. If so, then what is the F.E.C. afraid of? While it is realistic that there should be some threshold of qualification for entering the debates, Nader and Buchanan are not alone in requesting a review of the debate guidelines.

In a June news conference, Teamster president James P. Hoffa announced that he wants to see Nader and Buchanan included in the televised debates. Even if they don't have a "realistic" chance, they would at least force the major candidates to stop playing issue avoidance. An article in *Time* magazine has also backed their appeal to enter the debates, in order to avoid what the author refers to as an otherwise "excruciating" debacle. Gore and Bush claim that they're not afraid of the alternates, so why not include them? Leaving them out puts the fairness and accountability of these debates in question.

Raising another troublesome issue, Nader has recently filed a lawsuit against the F.E.C. for accepting millions of dollars in corporate sponsorship of the debates. The lawsuit states that "unlawful corporate contributions to the debates corrupts the political process, tilts the electoral playing field sharply toward the Democratic and Republican parties, undermining third parties and limiting the choices of voters." Nader considers this a violation of federal laws prohibiting corporate contributions to campaigns.

The standard theoretical argument for favoring two-party politics is to disallow a plurality win (a win by less than fifty percent of the vote) so as not to 'confuse' the voters. Somehow, though, many countries do manage to hold successful multi-party elections without sacrificing choice for the sake of 'stupidity'. Even with a fifty-one percent win, up to forty-nine percent of the voters may feel unrepresented.

The apathy in this country can easily be relegated to the belief that the American people don't care or are lazy. A better analysis would recognize that these people don't vote because standard politicians don't represent them. This sentiment is supported in the 1994 film *Manufacturing Consent*. It points out that, in Europe, approximately half the population votes for one of the reformist labor-based parties: socialist, labor, communist. This is roughly equal to the number of people that don't vote in the U.S. each election.

Though it remains a popular misconception, voting for a third party candidate is not a wasted vote; it signals defiance to politics as usual. A vote of support for a major party candidate who is the lesser of two evils signals only recurring defeat and subservience to the Republicrats. A vote against these major parties is concrete evidence of an active citizenry unhappy with the way things are. It makes politicians pay attention and lays the groundwork for a new way. For even if they don't win, if Nader or Buchanan get above five percent of the vote their parties will receive federal matching funds and aid from the government in the next election, and will keep their ballot access in many states. The common perception today is that the Democrats and the GOP are the integral and inescapable components of American politics. This is not the way it's always been. Keep in mind that there have been numerous parties throughout American history. Even the Republicans were once a nascent party, first organized in the mid-nineteenth century to abolish slavery.

John Adams once wrote, "there is nothing which I dread so much as the division of the Republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader, and concerting measures in opposition to each other. This in my humble apprehension, is to be dreaded as the greatest political evil under our constitution." ■

**Sources:**
Mazmanian, Daniel. Third Parties in Presidential Elections. Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1974.
McCarthy, Eugene J. The Ultimate Tyranny. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Jovanavich, 1980.
Monroe, Bill. "The Slow Poisoning of the First Amendment." Cato's Letters 7. Washington D.C.: Cato, 1990.
Powe, Lucas Jr. American Broadcasting and the First Amendment. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

**Contact Information:**
Federal Election Commission • 999 E Street, NW • Washington, DC 20463
(800) 424-9530 / In Washington: (202) 694-1100
For the hearing impaired: TTY (202) 219-3336 • http://www.fec.gov

# RALPH NADER

## Hitting Them Back:
## An Interview With Presidential Candidate

Reprinted with permission from the *Independent Weekly*. Copyright 2000.

**Ralph Nader picked an interesting time to launch his presidential campaign in North Carolina. While 80 percent of the state's registered voters were skipping the party primary elections last Tuesday, including their meaningless "beauty contests" for president, Nader was on college campuses in the Triangle staking his claim to be a legitimate, progressive alternative to 'Gore the drab, and Bush the dreary."**

**Nader said he'll sue, if necessary, to get himself on the North Carolina ballot as the candidate of the Green Party. By primary day, he'd already missed the state's effective deadline for independent and third-party candidate filings. North Carolina's ballot-access laws are the worst in the country, Nader said. Candidates are required to submit 51,324 signatures of registered voters by the beginning of May to get on the November ballot. The rules are unconstitutional, Nader said, and he'll challenge them in court unless the State Board of Elections extends the deadline for him.**

**Green Party organizers in the state had collected just 2,400 signatures by primary day. Nationally, they've put Nader's name on the ballot in 15 states so far, and expect to add another 19 states by the end of May, with an ultimate goal of at least 45.**

**Since the mid '60s, Nader's consumer advocacy has sparked such organizations as Public Citizen, Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), the Center for Auto Safety and the Center for the Study of Responsive Law. He ran what *The Nation* charitably called "a non-campaign" for president in 1996, with a self-imposed spending limit of $5,000, and got just 700,000 votes in 22 states. This time, he's aiming to raise $5 million and earn at least 5 percent of the national vote, the threshold to qualify the Green Party for public financing in the 2004 presidential election. (The Reform Party is getting $12.6 million this year based on Ross Perot's 8 percent showing in '96.)**

**Already, Nader says, a nationwide Zogby Poll gives him 5.7 percent in a four-way race, more than Reform contender Pat Buchanan.**

**In free-swinging speeches at N.C. State and UNC-Chapel Hill, the 66-year-old firebrand argued that supporting the Greens is the best way for younger voters to advance the progressive causes he's fought for all his adult life. Yes, the party is tiny, he conceded. But so was the Republican Party in 1854, when it was formed in reaction to the major parties' refusal to fight slavery. Six years later, Abraham Lincoln was president. "Never underestimate small political starts," said Nader.**

**Between his campus appearances, Nader met with *Independent* staff members Bob Geary, Barbara Solow, Afefe Tyechimba and Bob Moser at the Silk Road Tea House in Chapel Hill. He's an intense, unsmiling presence, passionate about his views and given to bad mimicry when it comes to politicians (I'll fight for *yoouuuu*," he'll suddenly mewl, after Al Gore). His views are nothing new to most Americans, of course. But in the doleful context of American politics circa 2000, they still seem startlingly different.**

**Why are you running for president?**
To defend the strength in our democracy. Democracy is being squeezed very badly in recent decades and citizen groups can't get anything done. They're closed out by the Congress, White House and regulatory agencies. So you either close up shop, lift the white flag, retire to the Hamptons—or you do something.

**A lot of progressives are excited about your candidacy—but would be more excited if there were a real chance that you could win. How do you make the argument that progressives should support you this year and risk throwing the election to George W. Bush?**
You've got stagnant political energies that are trapped by the two-party system and by the mindset that you've got to vote for the least of the worst or the lesser of two evils or the evil of two lessers, whatever way you want to put it. That's a form of imprisonment, a form of incarceration. If we're gonna liberate the political and civic energies of people, we have to do it in a new formulation, and a new political party is one part of that.

**Why do you think the Green Party is the best vehicle for liberating those energies?**
It starts with a very good platform: public financing of campaigns, national health insurance, strong labor laws for facilitating trade unions, a good civil-rights and civil-liberties platform, excellent environment proposals. And you can build it as you go along. The party doesn't have entrenched baggage or ties to vested interests.

**Assuming you don't win the White House in November, what would constitute a Nader victory?**
You cannot lose in this effort. You bring thousands of young people into progressive activity; that's a win. You bring hundreds of people into local and state candidacies, that's a win. You break 5 percent, you get federal funds for the Green Party in the next round. You cost the Democrats a few states.

We're going to surprise a lot of people. We're already at 9 percent in California, and the response from the Gore campaign is that they're not losing any sleep over this—which is exactly what I want to hear. Slumber on, Albert Gore, slumber on.

**Is victory then a Democratic loss? Would you be satisfied if the headline says, "Nader Cause for Democratic Loss"?**
If I was a Democrat I would, because they need a four-year cold shower to wake up. You know the Democrats are rotten, because when they win elections, they explain it by having taken some of the Republican issues and become more like Republicans. If they lose, they explain it by saying they weren't enough like the Republicans and were "too liberal."

We want the Democrats to lose with the explanation that they weren't progressive enough. They weren't

countervailing the concentration of corporate power and wealth enough. They weren't moving to progressive taxation of corporations enough. They weren't moving strongly to protect consumers. We want that explanation, and that's going to be a win.

See, the question I'd turn around is this: What is the limit of the least-of-the-worst voting decision? Let's say I believed in it. In 1976 I believed in it; 1980 I believed in it; 1984 I believed in it; 1988, 1992,1996... 'What have I got for it if I'm a Democrat other than chaining myself to a legitimization of this downward political spiral into the political pits? On the other hand, it's up to Gore, right? If he wants to take away our issues, to grab away our votes, he's free to do so. But he can't do so by groveling to the corporations. He can't do it by trying to expand NAFTA.

**If Gore does pick up on your issues, is there any hope that he would follow through with them in office?**
No. He speaks with chattering teeth and forked tongue, garnished by anal flutter. He's a coward from top to bottom, and he's betraying his own impassioned position in his book [*Earth in the Balance*] in 1992. There's clear framework here; we're not hypothesizing. He said internal combustion is a major threat to the global planet, then he and Clinton gave the industry an eight-year holiday from fuel-efficiency standards. A year or so ago he traveled to Detroit to get on his knees to prove to the auto companies that he's their friend.

And last week at Earth Day, instead of laying it to the auto companies, he pledges a further expansion of the billion-dollar partnership funding the clean engine and getting nothing in return. So the auto companies get a billion-and-a-quarter dollars, with another quarter-billion on the way, to do what they should do anyway in a time of massive profits: produce efficient engines for their cars. In return they do not promise to produce a prototype, they do not have a deadline, they collude in order to do nothing, they're exempted *de facto* from the antitrust enforcement policy of the administration, and they don't have to meet any mandatory fuel-efficiency standards. Now I ask you—could the Republicans have conceivably done worse?

**And when the election is over and you're not president...**
What makes you think that?

**Because you're essentially telling us that.**
No, I'm not. I'm just saying you don't develop ceilings for yourself or floors for yourself. You float like a butterfly and sting like a bee [laughs].

**On your Web site, VoteNader.com, you're calling for the "energies of committed citizens." That speaks to a belief that people are still very naturally politicized and ready to stand up. But what is your campaign doing to galvanize disenfranchised communities?**
We're trying to run with citizen groups on the ground on all levels—whether they're dealing with a polluted river or a corrupt political situation. The country is full of groups, right? So instead of parading in front of them and expecting them to be bystanders and onlookers, we connect with them. I went on a picket line with the head of the "Wisconsin AFL-CIO, where the University of Wisconsin was contracting out employees with no minimum benefits and low pay. We were with a homeless shelter in downtown Atlanta which the establishment does not like and is trying to squeeze out because it's on Peachtree Street in the business district and has 500 homeless people and they didn't want to see it. So they haven't given them a kitchen permit for two years.

So that's what we're doing. And that's the way it should be. The political should lock arms with the civic. When the political is rooted in the civic, it's not going to forget where it came from. When it's rooted in political-action-committee money and fancy dinners in the Denver Hilton or the Washington Hilton, that's where it's going to be coming from.

**There's no shortage of grassroots groups living in this country that are (a) discouraged, (b) very separate and (c) local. It will take an enormous effort, will it not, to draw them into the national political organizing effort?**
No, it won't take an enormous effort. It does take some modest fairness from the mass media. Remember, John Anderson went from 1 percent to 20 percent [in the polls during the 1980 campaign. Anderson finished with 7 percent of the vote.] Who knew John Anderson, right? Things can move very quickly.

The problem is that there are a number of progressives who are pretty adept at rationalizing their own futility. You've seen it:

You've come into restaurants like this and they have a brilliant diagnosis by the time the appetizer comes, they deepen the diagnosis and the injustice of the land by the time the entree comes, they're elaborating the diagnosis of the systemic injustice by the time dessert comes, then they rationalize their futility, get up and leave. That's a self-indulgence and that's unacceptable.

**But earlier today didn't you say that things have gone downhill for progressives since the '50s and '60s?**
No, it went up for about 20 years. To the extent that corporations are behaving better now, it's due to what happened in the '60s and '70s. They've got to recall their cars, right? They have to have certain standards for pollution control—though they're nothing like what we would like.

But since about '79, it has been pretty much downhill. The composition of Congress has changed; restrictions on access to the courts have gotten tighter. The political-action-committee money grip on our elections has gotten more pervasive, more *quid pro quo*. And there's the ability of global corporations to transcend our jurisdictions, giving them more leverage over labor, over our government, over shipping factories abroad.

The constructs of NAFTA and WTO are really an international form of autocratic government. The WTO court is closed to the public, to the press—no public transcript, no independent appeal and no enforceable conflict-of-interest [rules] on three trade judges who are judging health, safety and environmental issues about which they know nothing.

And these snide commentators looking at those ragged demonstrators two weeks ago, and laughing at them! Instead of taking the demonstration as a rebuke to the mass media, who have repeatedly ignored thoughtful press conferences, thoughtful reports, thoughtful congressional testimony—never reported a line, and forced the coalition against the IMF, World bank and WTO into the streets.

**The Rainbow Coalition has much the same strategy you've described of working with grass-roots groups. Have you talked to Jesse Jackson about your campaign?**
I've called Jesse, but he has a hard time returning calls. He's thrown his lot into the Democratic Party, and they make him an emissary here and he gets a little bit of his positions accepted there, and he doesn't want to break off. He says, "I've been on the outside and I've been on the inside and, believe me, it's better being on the inside." Well, good luck. He's using them and they're using him and he knows it. And it's too bad, because he could lead a major third-party movement.

**The Clinton administration failed with its initiatives on race. If you were elected president what would you do differently?**
I'd turn race relations into class relations. I don't see people who have decent standards of living ripping into each other on the basis of race. To some extent the military has demonstrated that they opened up equal opportunity and you see black, Hispanic and white military people getting along pretty well. By and large, that's a significant success story because they get the same pay, the same opportunities, they've got to obey the same people, a white private has to obey a black sergeant.

Clinton is not willing to do that. Clinton is petrified of the phrases "class warfare" and "redistribution of wealth"- even though we have been redistributing our wealth upward, with the top 1 percent of the wealthiest having the financial wealth of the bottom 95 percent. He won't tackle that, he won't touch it. That's why he won't go after consumer protection in the ghetto. This is really absurd. These people are being ripped to shreds by business criminals. The kids are being poisoned by lead-based paint peeling off the walls; the landlords are not taking it out. The police don't distribute their protection sufficiently in the poorer areas. Other municipal services are delivered in a discriminatory way, based on class as well as race, and these people are paying 40, 50, 80 percent interest. Buy television sets or furniture and you end up paying five times the amount. Where's the protection? The laws are on the books. They are not being enforced.

Gore and Clinton have never made a consumer-policy speech, not once. I've asked them repeatedly. John F. Kennedy did. Lyndon Johnson did. These people, they cannot upset big business. They cannot upset crooked local business.

**The issues you're talking about will be well understood in low-income communities. But how will you get the attention of the middle class?**
You show me any audience in this

GORE AND CLINTON HAVE NEVER MADE A CONSUMER-POLICY SPEECH, NOT ONCE. I'VE ASKED THEM REPEATEDLY. JOHN F. KENNEDY DID. LYNDON JOHNSON DID. THESE PEOPLE, THEY CANNOT UPSET BIG BUSINESS. THEY CANNOT UPSET CROOKED LOCAL BUSINESS.

country, label it any way you want to label it, and I'll get through to them, whether they're evangelical Christians, conservatives, moderates, progressives, liberals, blue-collar workers, white-collar workers. I'll get through to them because they all have the same touchstone: It's getting worse and worse. The people are losing control over their country. At every level, at every dimension, including their own children. Their children are being seduced by these corporate hucksters, from overmedication to the exploitation of the violent, addictive, pornographic entertainment that's inflicted on them.

What culture would allow its children to be turned over 30 hours a week in pre-teen years to these corporate hucksters, these electronic child molesters? They're just getting into their minds in the most disgusting way.

Look, let's talk about corporations for what they are. Corporate crime kills, injures and makes more people sick by far than street crime, although when you ask a politician "What's your position on crime?" the politician immediately assumes it's street crime, not corporate crime. When politicians are asked their position on welfare, it's assumed it's poverty welfare, not corporate welfare. When politicians are asked about regulation, they automatically assume it's government regulation, not corporate regulation.

**The ability to regulate corporations is made difficult by their multinational nature, obviously. And then the argument will be made: You can't have laws against laissez-faire treatment of corporations or they'll move to Mexico. How do you get at that?**
Because their biggest market is the West, you get at that by saying they don't get into this market unless they meet certain standards abroad. So we have trade agreements that lift up standards against brutalized child labor, that allow independent union organization and due process in the courts. If our companies want to go and build factories in those markets, then those laws pertain.

That's the fallacy of free trade: There *is* no free trade, it's corporate-managed trade. When they go abroad for cheap labor, that labor cost and that environmental cost and the other costs are kept down by brute force by the dictators that they're supporting. That is an unfair trade method, and the way you respond to an unfair trade method is to block it at the border, say, "You're not coming in."

**What kinds of regulations would you like to see on the tobacco industry?**
Eliminate all advertising by tobacco, and really enforce the protection of children who are still being lured in various ways. Push for anti-smoking clinics to be funded by the tobacco companies all over the U.S.- free, so people don't pay. Push to de-lethalize the cigarette through research. Tax the cigarette companies at the source heavily. Right now we tax the pack of cigarettes, but you can also tax the profits. You gotta get it at both sides . Because if you tax the cigarettes, they just transfer it on to the cigarette smokers. You gotta hit them back.

**What did you think of the tobacco settlement and the role of trial lawyers in it?**
Heroic greed at work. That's what it was. It was a terrible agreement with a lot of bad fine print, but it was better than nothing. It did break through. The tobacco companies are on the defensive. Sure, they're still making money, transferring the costs onto the smokers. But the higher the cost of tobacco, the lower the death rate. That's what studies have shown over the years.

**Your organizations have been criticized for depending on trial lawyers' contributions, and some will wonder whether you can be an independent player on issues of tort reform.**
That's a false predicate that was fostered by some blowhard trial lawyers quoted in *Forbes* magazine years ago. They said, "Oh, we support him in every way." I called the guy up and said, "Oh really? This is news to me, brother." Public Citizen gets less than 1 percent of its money over the years from lawyers—all lawyers, including trial lawyers.

**So what is your opinion of trial lawyers?**
In our type of political economy, if you don't have vested interest on the side of the oppressed and weak, they'll wipe out their rights. So, more power to the trial lawyers. Do you know any other force in American society that can bring corporations to justice? I don't. The regulators don't do it, the legislatures aren't doing it. It's our civil-justice system, provoked by the initiative of trial lawyers, many of whom are quite greedy, but all of whom are extremely energetic and bold. They take huge risks. You know any other profession that will only get paid by its clients if it wins and doesn't get paid if it loses? Wouldn't it be nice if your doctor only got paid if you're healthy?

What *The Wall Street Journal* forgets is that the trial lawyers do not create the wrongdoing, and they don't make the decisions. It's the judge and the jury, and 80 percent of the judges in our country were formerly business lawyers. They're not radicals. They don't read Karl Marx on their lunch break. And yet these trial lawyers are pilloried from A to Z. It's as if they are doing something criminal.

**Well, their fees are considered excessive sometime.**
Not by the standards of corporate executive pay. Think of Disney, Eisner- $200 million a few years ago.

**You'll put an end to that, though.**
Sure, I'd make the shareholders vote on executive compensation and that would put an end to it.

**And then could we limit lawyers' fees, too?**
It's up to the attorneys general.

**As your campaign is growing so are the smears. It's been said that you project yourself as a higher-than-thou Everyman, though in reality you are quite wealthy and that you're prone to being harsh with people who work for you.**
The people I've worked with are extremely independent. I give them huge autonomy. Actually, I'm too soft on them compared to years ago. I say, 'This is the area you want to work? Go with it." They go with it. They don't check in, they don't check out. They're on their own, as long as they produce an accurate product.

I've never said I'm poor. But what I have is reaped by any corporate executive in a week. I'm very frugal; I don't spend much on myself. The money I have is spent on the project, past, present and future. So I keep a reserve for future projects and future contingency. I look at what I have as basically a trust fund for the public in terms of the projects we've been pursuing over the years.

I give away 50 percent of adjusted gross income to 501(c)(3) charitable institutions. Last year, Bush gave away 16 percent and Gore gave away 6 percent, up from 1 percent.

What other crimes am I accused of? That I'm self-righteous. Self-righteous people use the word "I" a lot. Not me.

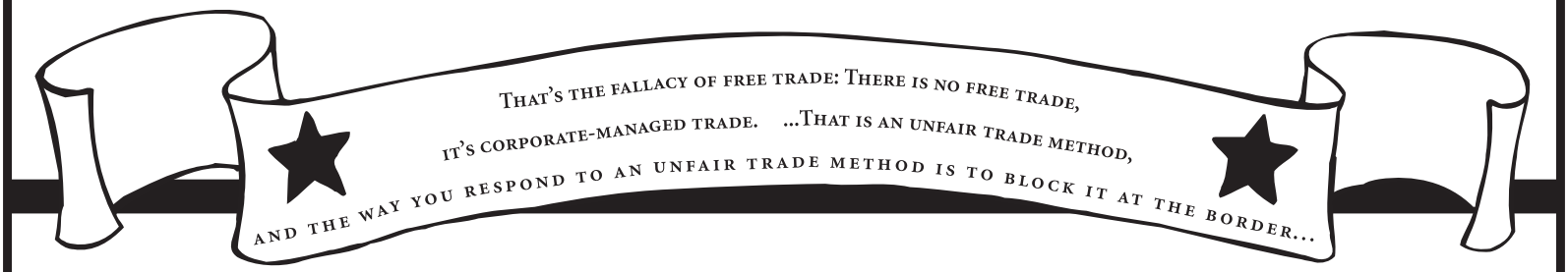
**You could also be accused of being too austere for a country that is bubbling over with prosperity. You think people are ready to listen to your message?**
You've seen the figures: 20 percent child poverty. Majority of workers making less today and working longer than 25 years ago. This is reality; I'm giving you statistics. You talk to anyone, they're running around frantic, trying to make ends meet. Commuting longer, less time with the kids. They don't listen to Greenspan saying our economy is prosperous and sound. They see what happens every day. They're in deeper and deeper consumer debt. They can't make ends meet.

This isn't austerity. We've got to recognize our priorities. The biggest thing we can do with our lives is advance justice in society, period. That's the great mission of human beings without which there is no liberty, no freedom. And I define freedom the way Cicero defined it 2,000-plus years ago: Freedom is participation in power.

**In order to be a powerful presidential candidate, as you've said, you'll need to break through in the mass media. How will you do it?**
If you do something outlandish—I have seven things I can do that are outlandish, which I'll not tell you—that'll land you on Page One. But I'll not do it. I'm not going to have the media drive me into outrageous misbehavior. That's what they're basically waiting for. It's not going to happen.

**Will you tell a personal story in the campaign, the way John McCain did so effectively?**
I *am* the personal story. What, you think I have free time?

**But people will want to know what's in your heart, not just what's in your head.**
They're merged. They were operated on a long time ago to merge by my parents. My parents said, "Your heart is your mind and your mind is your heart." ■


That's the fallacy of free trade: There is no free trade,
it's corporate-managed trade. ...That is an unfair trade method,
and the way you respond to an unfair trade method is to block it at the border...

# Book Reviews

*A Language Older Than Words* by Derek Jensen
(338 pages / Paperback)
*Context Books • 368 Broadway • NYC, NY 10013 • www.contextbooks.com*

Jensen eloquently draws the reader into a powerful metaphor between his abusive childhood and global environmental and socio-economical atrocities. Classical, widely accepted Western philosophy and religion have traditionally been used as a sort of perverse justification for environmental and social ills. A long-time activist, teacher, and writer, Jensen is able to deliver a story line that offers up convincing reasons that suggest the need to debunk such ideology.

The premise that resurfaces throughout the book is that we, as humans, have isolated ourselves and ideas to the point where we feel that interspecies communication is not possible. Now by itself this sounds a bit hokey, but it's not necessarily this that Jensen sets out to prove, as he uses it as an example of how removed from survival and our environment we have become.

The book fluctuates between an intriguing, poetic memoir of his past and a politically radical, activist-oriented interpretation of our present world. Backed with evidence, research, and witty writing, this book comes with our heavy recommendation for anyone interested in taking back our environment and lives. (DL)

# Record Reviews

We have decided to review records from this issue forth, but both the music and the packaging design will be critiqued within the review. We hope that people continue to think of their own records and the records they are releasing or consuming as a package unit that, together, further represents the ideas of the band and cohesiveness of the 'unit.' Unless otherwise noted, all addresses are in the United States. Any review material should be sent to: MediaReader • POB 994 • Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

As a reference point, this is what the reviewers have been listening to as of late:

Dave Laney: **Johnny Cash** *Folsom Prison,* **Talking Heads** *Speaking in Tongues,* **Built To Spill** *Live*, **3 Mile Pilot** s/t, **Belle and Sebastian** *If You're Feeling Sinister*, **Blonde Redhead** *Melody of Certain Damaged Lemons*, **Jawbox** *Grippe*, Sonic Youth - live, **Black Heart Procession** *s/t*

Sean Husick:**Song of Zarathustra** *Discography*, **the Faint** *Blank-Wave Arcade,* **Botch** *We are the Romans*, **Yaphet Kotto** *The Killer Was in the Government Blankets*, **3 Mile Pilot** *Another Desert, Another Sea*, **Fugazi** End Hits, **Nation of Ulysses** 13-Point Program...

Roby Newton: **Palace Brothers** s/t, **Minutement** *Double Nickels on the Dime*, **Patti Smith** *Horses*, **Neurosis** *Word as Law*, **Drive Like Jehu** s/t, **Big Black** *Atomizer*, **Black Heart Procession** s/t, **Bright Eyes** *Letting Off the Happiness*, **De La Soul** *Three Feet High and Rising*, **Patsy Cline** *Her Greatest Hits*

**Adult Film Makers** s/t CD ★★½
*Demonbeach • P.O. Box 6693 • Raleigh, NC 27628-6693 • www.demonbeach.com*
Good garagey 60's rock from an ex-member of Pipe. Dirty guitar riffs, 4-on-the-floor drum beats, and Jagger-esque vocals make me think a lot of the Rolling Stones and maybe even the Cramps…no drum machines, no keyboards, no pretending, just 9 songs of straight ahead rock and roll. They even throw in an Iggy Pop cover.

**Ed Burgess**, Graphic Manipulation, 4 color, 4 panel booklet ★½
A video still with some Photoshop filter work. Obviously done at low resolution. The photo on the back is colorfully artsy but given that this does seem like a fun band, I don't think the rest of the package captures enough seriousness. (SH)

**Aloha** - That's Your Fire CD ★★★★½
*Polyvinyl Records Company • Post Box 1885 • Danville, IL 61834 • www.polyvinylrecords .com*
Aloha sails though this well-crafted, extraordinarily paced debut, with great songs and strange instrumentation. The drumming is jazzy, with strong, solid bass lines that give grounding to vibraphone, synthesizer, and guitar. The vocals are sort of like John Doe, but smoother. The sound eludes description, the closest comparison I can come up with is fIREHOSE at a clipper pace; it moves in a similar way, like sailing or wind...

**Design**: "Need Aloha cover art or photos? For ready-to-use, high resolution, pre-scanned album cover art and band photo files go to: www.polyvinylrecords.com/presskits." Thanks, Polyvinyl, but I don't have a computer. . . (ЯN)

**Black Kali Ma** "You Ride The Pony (I'll Be The Bunny)" CD ★★
*Alternative Tentacles • P.O. Box 419092 • San Francisco, CA 94141-9092*
These guys do what they do really well, but what they're doing is 2 parts Motorhead and 2 parts Lynrd Skynrd. Not my kind of recipe, but if you're hungry for something different…

**Sam Floyd**, Cover Art, **Jason Rosenberg**, Design, 4 color 6 panel fold-out ★
This is one of the most disgusting record cover's that I have ever seen. Pink, orange, yellow, green, and a couple of animals straight out of MacPaint. Intentional or not—it's straight-up busted.(SH)

**Botch** "We are the Romans" CD ★★★½
*Hydrahead Records • P.O. Box 990248 • Boston, MA 02199 • www.hydrahead.com*
David, David, Tim, and Brian create an atmosphere of demolition and destruction with repetitive techy guitars, calculated beats, stop-start breaks and bottom of the lungs vocals. Words like, "Support this, support that, once again it's only an act..." reinforce the sincerity of these 4 Seattle guys who drive the listener through song after song—where most new school's "face-value" ethics only disappoint. Powerfully creative and refreshing math-metal keeps this volume of songs in my stack of most listened to.

**David Knudson**, Designer, 4 color, 8 panel gate fold digipack ★★
Hydrahead Records' dedication to releasing attractive records has always gained my respect as an organization, but this release's art leaves a bit to be desired. Although the designer's intentions, by using only a couple heavily saturated colors, might have been to convey a feeling of unease, it's kind of like sitting down to a plate of just green beans and rice—no color, just a stomach ache. (SH)

**Bright Eyes** "Fevers and Mirrors" CD ★★★★★
*Saddle-Creek • POB 8554 • Omaha, NB 68108 • www.saddle-creek.com*
Only once or twice a year is a record this compelling released. Conor Oberst's song writing abilities greatly exceed that of most contemporary solo artists, aesthetically relying on the hand-strummed minor chords and melodic dissonance created by his acoustic guitar. Lyrically, he convincingly demands that we wander into his world of travel, heartbreak, neuroses, and depression. Upbeat and scary at times, slow and lulling at others, Mike Mogis and Andy Lemaster lend their hands with percussion, keyboard, and vocal accompaniment to fill out the songs. The recording quality is great and the sampling and vocal tricks are an area that Conor usually exceeds most expectations, proving his mastery of the equipment. Really, there are not enough good things to say about this album. Released by a label that has been pumping out tons of great bands lately, you should check out what's going on in Omaha.

**Zach Nipper & Robb Nansel**, Designers, 8 Panel CD Accordion ★★★½
The front cover is great. There's a oval shaped die-cut revealing a mirror on the next level down. A deep burgundy wallpaper is used for the background image throughout the entire booklet, and while I view it as fitting and relevant, the lyrics are in thin, sans-serif font that is about 3pt, making it extremely difficult to read along. It ended up like this because of the large amount of words to these songs, but I still wish that I could more easily read them. The mirror, however, is damn impressive. (DL)

**Built to Spill** "Live" 2xLP ★★★★
*Up! • POB 21328 • Seattle, WA • 98111*
If this record wasn't a live release, it probably would have gotten 5 stars. Amazing songs, including a great 20 minute Neil Young cover, but almost all of them have been previously released. Catchy, guitar-based, poppy indy-rock with vocals reminiscent of (guess who) Neil Young. The interplay between these four musicians establishes this band as one of the few groups that pushing their genre to new places. It's great to hear them pull off the songs in a live context, as they do all the tricks almost flawlessly.

**Tae Won Yu**, Design + Photography, LP Jacket ★★★★
Heavy contrast between the black and white photos and cool blue-grays give the cover a smooth feel. All the names are hand-drawn, and the back consist of a collage of colorized photographs, perfectly complimenting the somewhat quirky, yet heavily-stylized musical style. Almost reminiscent of some of the older Sonic Youth albums, it's nice to see an album that doesn't feel like the designer went to the computer before having an idea about the content. (DL)

**Cross My Heart** The Reason I Failed History CDep ★½
*Dim Mak Records • PO Box 14041 • Santa Barbara, CA 93107*
Melodic pop with the occasional chugga-chugga breakdown that really breaks down to the credit of the singer, whose vocal stylings are a combination of Queensryche and Live. The bass lines are the strong point, typical with this form of music, good "More Than A Feeling"-type riffs high in the mix. It sounds very radio-friendly, for all you closet Bush fans.

**Brian Roettinger**, Designer, 4-panel CD booklet ★★
The cover has nice muted oranges and good texture (crackled paint), though it looks better on the actual CD with more contrast. The placement of text and use of font is weak and without any apparent structure, better on the cover than the inside of the booklet, however. Also, no lyrics are printed, something I consider an inexcusable offense. And, no, I didn't, and most people wouldn't, take the time to write Dim Mak to get the lyrics. (ЯN)

**Cross My Heart** "Temporary Contemporary" CD ★
*Deep Elm • P.O. Box 36939 • Charlotte, NC 28236 • www.deepelm.com*
Well, I have to admit that I couldn't finish listening to this record. I think the Jimmy Eat World "Clarity" record is awesome too guys.

**John Szuch**, Layout/Design, **Madeline Gallagher**, Cover Art, 4 color , 6 panel fold-out ★★★
At least it looks good, right? I've really been getting into pastels lately so I guess I'm a sucker for that right now. Good clean look to it. I guess it's supposed to expose their sensitive side.

**Cursive** "Cursive's Domestica" CD ★★½
*Saddle Creek • P.O. Box 8554 • Omaha, NE 68108-0554 • www.saddle-creek.com*
This album has the potential of growing on me but didn't necessarily get my attention from the get-go. Somewhere between Karate and Built to Spill, Cursive's Domestica is 9 very polished and mood-invoking pop testaments to this bands longevity. Disturbingly calm, smooth, and tricky tunes keep you from ease while mopey, "uninterested with the world" vocals start playing tricks on your own self-confidence. If this is indeed what marriage is all about, I don't want anything to do with it.

**Justin Kozisek**, **Robb**, **Cursive**, Layout & Design 4 color, 8 panel fold-out ★★★★
Very impressive. It really makes a lot more sense after listening to the album a few times. Straight from a movie poster from the Independent Film Festival of your choice. Good photography, text placement, and the tightest line screen on a 4 color CD silkscreen I have ever seen.(SH)

**Division of Laura Lee / Impel** split 7" ★★★
*Carcrash Records • PO Box 39 • 46221 Vänersborg • Sweden*
Sweden's DoLL play mid-tempo rock music that is, at times almost too much so, comparable to Drive Like Jehu. Compared to their other material, this song pulls them a little away from the Jehu reference while still maintaining a solid rock feel. Having only one song, this feels a bit like a teaser, as leaves you wanting their entire album. Impel reminds me a lot of Strikeforce Diablo, with the occasional guitar complexity of the last Refused record. The vocals seem somehow out of place in that they don't flow well, making this side far less interesting.

**Hook & Lato**, Design, 7-Inch Jacket ★★
The record physical looks nice, but at this point the design aesthetic should be made into a stock-template. Blurry picture of guy playing guitar for the bottom 3/5, while the remaining room houses the bands names with a condensed sans-serif font. It does however use one color well enough to trick you into thinking it was two. Lifetime put out a few records like this that are the most notable. (DL)

**Electrolochmann** Give Me My Eat LP ★★★
*TranSolar Records • P.O. Box 23529 • 10127 Berlin • Germany*
Ahlie Schaubel (vocals and guitar, additionally, vocals in the Monochrome Collective) has one of the most fabulously catchy voices to grace the air in recent memory. Her voice carries the four piece through melodic pop songs in varied languages, though unfortunately, rather unvaried tempo, ranging from a slow sway to a moderate head bop. The tedious tempo is the downfall of this record, the guitars are appealingly sparse and minor and the bass has effective, though perhaps overused, progressions.

**Helm Pfohl/Julia Kühne**, Bureau der Form, Designers, LP jacket, flat insert ★★★★
TranSolar records are, without exception, well designed. Sterile interior photographs and comparative tones create a suave atmosphere, a coldness whose front is melted only by the warmth of a cute little drawing of a beaver. (ЯN)

**Engine Down** To Bury Within The Sound CD ★★★½
Lovitt Records • POB 248 • Arlington, VA 22210 • www.lovitt.com
Engine Down have mastered the sappy ballad with this record. It doesn't break through to any new genres, but they make good use of pre-existing interpretations of "emotive" music and combine these influences into easy-listening, pretty songs. The musicianship is solid, the lyrics are romantic and simple, and they move through the quiet-loud formula gracefully, though not particularly powerfully. The vocals are sing-song and reminiscent of later Jeremy Enigma, without the dramatic range.

**Engine Down**, Design, 6 pg CD Booklet ★★★
Sparse and arty two color design that relates well to the conceptual package of space, abstractness, and observation. My main complaints are that the serif font is too thin on the cover, and when used to display the lyrics it's almost unreadable. (ЯN)

**The Exploder** "West End Kids Crusade" CD ★★★
*Dim Mak • P.O. Box 14041 • Santa Barbara, CA 93107 • www.dimmak.com*
This reminds me a lot of Bad Guy Reaction. Another Richmond band from back in the day. Hell, maybe it's some of the same people. I don't know, but I *do* know that this record's pretty alright. Not all that special but consistent. 6 songs of full on emo-rock. A little bit of Jehu, a little Sleepytime, and a little Angus Young for good measure. Hard hitting drums, big guitars, and crackily screams make this not too shabby of a purchase.

**KT Thomas,** The Exploder, Layout, 3 color, 4 panel fold ★★★
Blue, black, and red. Good color combo. Thick black lines plus the Upper/Lower san serif gives this that new school contempo look. Clean and simple. I like it. (SH)

**Five Eight** "The Good Nurse" CD ★★
*Deep Elm • P.O. Box 36939 • Charlotte, NC 28236 • www.deepelm.com*
This album seems interesting enough, I guess, but it sounds so hollow to me. The guy's vocal melodies and singing inability really starts to get on my nerves, but the accompaniment of slide guitar and strange instruments makes up for that in a Built to Spill or Neil Young kind of way. Not too terrible of a record, but there's a only a few people that can pull this type of alternative rock off and I'm not convinced that Five Eight are living up to their potential.

**Terry Rowlett**, paintings, 6 panel fold-out ★★★
This has the look of an old thread bound library book. The paintings on the cover look really nice and reinforce the cover's nostalgic look. Great consistency overall with one of the coolest CD silkscreens I've seen, but I'm a bit disappointed that the cover "red" and the back tray "red" don't match.(SH)

**Hacksaw** s/t CD ★
*SpectraSonicSound • P.O. Box 80067 • Ottawa, ON, Canada • k1s 5n6 • www.spectrasonic.com*
I didn't finish listening to this one either. A terrible version of some Rollins Band shit. I didn't even know people still listened to that kind of music, let alone play it.

**Andrew Draper**, Design/Mechanics, 4 color, 6 panel fold-out ★
Although the photos in this look good, the rest of the layout directly reflects the music—a grunge font plus some "manly" trucks and machines. I guess it's a "post-hardcore thing," I wouldn't understand.(SH)

**International Noise Conspiracy** "Survival Sickness" LP ★★★
*Burning Heart Records • Box 441 • 701 48 Örebro • Sweden*
Dennis LyXzén from Refused resurfaces as the lead singer in this band. Before Refused's last record, I had never heard of a band getting so much flack for ripping off not the music, but the style of another band. While that record, *The Shape of Punk to Come*, was heavily compared to the Nation of Ulysses, the International Noise Conspiracy are finding themselves unable to now avoid the comparison to Ian Svenious' new band, the MakeUp. Ironically enough, the comparison is again because of their style rather than the actual music. INC play old garage punk very along the lines of the Stooges or the Headcoats, but with a super left-wing political slant. It's party rock for the revolution and the insert attests to this, filled with neo-situationist text explaining their songs in an anti-capitalist/commodification light (which comes off a bit suspect when you consider their label is owned by Epitaph and their band has ads in all the major *Spin*-type magazines). This is almost a guilty pleasure to listen to. Very positive and against the status-quo, but I don't know if they'll be able to get around their influences and their own ironic position.

**Design**, LP Jacket ★★★★½
Three colors: Black, Red, Yellow. Very blocky color spots on a black background accompanied by black and white, 1960s era drawings of style people. They use only one font, a condensed sans-serif, throughout the cover. From some reason unbeknownst to me it carries the feeling of anti-establishment package, which compliments the content well. It's hard to describe but graphically conveys a secure, sound design. Second only to an amazing Monochrome LP, this is one of the best looking records I'm reviewing this issue.

**J Church** "One Mississippi" CD ★★★½

*Honest Don's. POB 192027. San Francisco, CA 94119*

It's been 5 years since J Church released their last LP, and now they're back with a new lineup that includes Jawbreaker's Adam Pfahler on drums. Although their music is traditionally overly-formulaic, they always seem to pump out sing-along, poppy songs that make you overlook this. Kelly Green's (great) vocals appear on two of the songs and help vary the feel of the album which is much more produced than their previous material. The production really shows in the pop smoothness, which makes J Church sound a little less distinctive. Still though, the lyrics shine as usual as Lance Hahn tells us stories that place us in his San Franciscan environment of unemployment and physical ailment. The people in this band have been responsible for literally decades of great and influential music, making this record more than worthy of checking out. It's a point pop record that always sounds like J Church, but points to subtle influences by Social Distortion and They Might Be Giants (subtle influences I say).

**John Yates / Stealworks**, Design, 8-panel CD accordion ★★★½

I've always respected the hell out John Yates' ideals, design, and books. In this CD, Yates chooses four photos with muted blues (1 per panel), and brings out the starkness of each photo by placing a vertical, solid black bar across 1/3 of the photo. Individually, each panel well-compliments the lyrical tone and thematical substance of the record. Together, however, they lose the power that the individual images carry. Each panel as a large poster would be ideal (but obviously unrealistic for the format). I'm not a big fan of the "typewriter" font that is exclusively used in this design, but it seems to work well enough. The photos are so nice that I keep thinking about how nice they would be individually on a wall, very large.(DL)

**MC Paul Barman** How Hard Is That? 12" Single ★★★★★

*Matador Records • 625 Broadway • New York, NY 10012*

Wow, this is an incredibly vast improvement over his full length. His outrageous wit is way funnier when applied to lifestyle instead of sex, and his phrasing and style have gotten more refined, legitimate as opposed to novel. The production is phenomenal, both songs have great samples and beats.

**Garland Lyn**, Designer, LP jacket ★★★★★

The cover is hilarious, bold color photos and well-chosen fonts. Props to Andrew Jeffrey Wright for the photography. (ЯN)

**Monochrome** "Laser View from the Inside" LP ★★★★

*Trans Solar Records • PO Box 02 35 29 • 01027 Berlin • Germany*

This German 6-piece is always recorded so distinctly that I can recognize them from just a few notes of any song. I think that 3 Mile Pilot may be the only other band I can say that for. FYI: Germany's Monochrome is the band Dawnbreed with the addition of female vocalist Ahlie Schaubel. Flowing between German, English, and French, Monochrome romances the listener with sparse guitars, super-catchy vocals, and solid drum beats. This record is crafted in such a unique way that it will appease almost any fan of pop music, but still contains enough grit to entrance the listeners of hardcore. Very Recommended.

**Helm Pfohl** / Bureau der Form, Designer, LP Jacket and 6 panel 8"x8" booklet ★★★★★

Helm Pfohl is responsible for all the TransSolar design, which is almost always exceptional. This LP is solid gray with all print in metallic silver. There are no pictures or images, and the minimalist design is pulled off solidly. Inside, the oversized booklet is designed so flawlessly that it looks like it should be showcased in a design magazine. If you're into design, you need to check out some of the records and posters this guy has done.

**The No WTO Combo** Live From the Battle in Seattle CDep ★★★★

*Alternative Tentacles • PO Box 419092 • San Francisco, CA 94141*

Jello Biafra, Krist Novoselic (Nirvana), Kim Thayil (Soundgarden), and Gina Mainwal unite to play protest songs against the WTO, live in Seattle. As one would expect, all the songs sound like the Dead Kennedys, one actually is a DK cover and another is a DOA cover. In addition to the punkity rockity, there is some engaging spoken word by Jello that left me feeling empowered. This is a very informative document for those who weren't there, especially for those curious to know how an aged punker interpreted the event. Included in the package is a booklet with written accounts of Jello and Krist's experiences at the protest, information about the WTO and a fairly extensive contact list for more information.

**Shepard Fairey**, Designer, 28 page CD booklet ★★★★

Standard Shep Fairey (Andre the Giant, Subliminal) excellence, his style is recognizable with its obvious Soviet Socialist propaganda influence and bold super-saturated colors. The booklet is also laid out well, simple and legible, with good photographs of the protest. (ЯN)

**Noam Chomsky** "Case Studies in Hypocrisy: US Human Rights Policy" 2xCD ★★★★★

*Alternative Tentacles • POB 419092 • San Francisco, CA 94141 /AK Press • www.akpress.org*

Noam Chomsky is considered by many to be the quintessential left-wing USA political commentator of our time. He continues to release book after book, speech after speech, and recording after recording- often in conjunction with Alternative Tentacles and AK Press (two of the few independent organizations that can actually touch this stuff). This CD set is amazing, filled with the quality content that you would and should expect from Chomsky, this time on many tangents within the two broad categories of US Human Rights and US-Iraq Policy. My only complaint is that Chomsky is a bit difficult to fully absorb in CD format. The flipside of this, however, is that you can listen to it if you have to take a long-distance trip in your. This is almost 2 hours long, so be prepared to sit down and listen.

Design, 4-panel CD Booklet ★★★

Nice looking package, though this isn't really the idea with this release so much. Heavy use of red/white/blue in conjunction with our national mascot, the bald eagle.

**Phillipé** "The Essence Continues" CD ★★★

*Flower Violence • Ralf Bock • Augartenstrasse 15 • 68165 • Mannheim, Germany • www.flowerviolence.de*

"Fender Twin" guitar kicking , whispering, yelling, Germans. Phillipé's great song structures, hooks, and eerieness are sure to grab the attention of any Nation of Ulysses fan. 12 songs that seem to be made for each other really make this a "start to finish" album.

**O. Hengel**, Cover Mechanics, 4 color, 6 panel fold-out ★★★

It has this really creepy quality about it. Not in a bad way, but in that "USA's Silk Stalkings" kind of way. The inside photo overlapping the fold with that bonus white space has tragic potential but was pulled off quite nicely.(SH)

**PlanesMistakenForStars** "Knife in the Marathon" CD ★★★½

*Deep Elm • P.O. Box 36939 • Charlotte, NC 28236 • www.deepelm.com*

When I first heard of this band, I believe I was in Northern California. And maybe because the comments I received were delivered from V-necks and empty back packs, I got the impression that Planes Mistaken For Stars were just another weak, shoe-gazer, post-rock, Sunny Day rip off. But when my band hooked up with them for a show right outside of their hometown of Denver, I was shaken. After the show, the singer/guitarist guy gave us some t-shirts and cd's and we went on our way. Now granted, this 5-song CD doesn't capture all of the energy I so intently witnessed in Colorado, it does display some great, fast paced, Lifetime-style hardcore that I think we've all been missing for a while now. Raw, gritty, straight forward…punk rock has some hope yet.

**CD 3-fold booklet** ★

Black + white with a skull and the name of the band. Design through undesign? (SH)

**Quetzal** The Messenger Lies Bleeding CD ★★★★

*Conspiracy Records • P.O. Box 269 • Antwerp 1 • Belgium*

Winding, technical bass and guitar lines break into anthemic hardcore, taking the youth crew to calculus class. Three members sing, sometimes meeting in eerie harmonies. The lyrics are good, paranoid personal-as-political type content that, as sung, make me want to shoot out some electric eyes instead of closing my door.

**Design**, Twelve-panel accordion booklet ★★★★

The cover is a monochrome olive photo that folds out to small poster size. It begins to look a bit like a pattern on fabric, a nice effect. They use some kind of chicken scratch handwriting font throughout, great for consistency and recognition, but really illegible and ugly. The jewel case is clear and the back tray cover is printed with a cool fish-eye photo where the CD fits in. (ЯN)

**Rodeo Boy** "How Is It Where You Are?" CD ★★★★

*Sit-n-Spin • 8 Market St. • Wilmington, NC 28401*

I think the first thing I noticed about this record is how the vocals and every instrument really has room to breathe. That gives a good organic, down to earth, "I know where they're coming from" kind of sound. So while making you feel right at home, Rodeo Boy's 11 song "How Is It Where You Are" shows you what it means to write good songs. Quirky guitar picking, lazy solos, solid back beats, and James' nonchalant vocal style put this in my "feel good/ feel bad" rock category. Any mood you invent, they have a song for it—and you can relate with every one.

**Greg Walston, Rodeo Boy,** Design "4 color, 4 panel fold" ★★★

Nice photo and color scheme on the front, but the back leaves a bit to be desired. I can't tell if it was just printed bad or if it was by design. Overall good looking though. (SH)

**Soeza** s/t 7" ★

*X-Mist • POB 1545 • 72195 Nagold • Germany*

Up-temp rock with a party feel, which is largely attributed to the horn. There's a lot of singing and it's mixed at a relatively low volume which is a bit frustrating. There are a bunch of jumbled things going on that make me anxiously nervous, thinking that Soeza hasn't yet made the record they seem capable of.

**Design** 7-Inch Jacket ★

The sticker on the 7" bag is the only place "Soeza" is spelled out, which works sometimes, but in case the actual print on the jacket isn't in possession of the type of design that warrants this. The lyrics are impossible to read, fluctuating between font sizes and italics. There wasn't too much thought put into the design here.(DL)

**Song of Zarathustra** "Discography" 10" Picture Disc ★★★★★

*Blood of the Young • P.O. Box 14411 • Minneapolis, MN 55414 • www.blood-of-the-young.com*

As the story goes…3000 years ago, Zarathustra was a prophet of the world's first monotheistic religion. He spent about 10 years of his early adult life in solitary retreat in a mountain cave somewhere in ancient Persia—the area we now call Iran. During this time he received revelations of the oneness of all existence and the clear light of pure mind and composed many songs to express his insights to the people of his land… Even though the band do not hail from an Iranian mountain cave, and in no capacity ramble on about the oneness of all existence, they do pull off the most powerfully contained violence to make even Zarathustra himself proud. I listen to every snare hit and every scream on the edge of my seat—just waiting for a breath in between discordant guitar bend after another. Combined with subtle keyboards and machine gun drumbeats, this record makes The Locust look like a flock of seagulls.

**Color Picture Disc + 10 page booklet** ★★

I just went and totally rocked out to these guys and picked up the second pressing of this 10" that is now entitled "Discography Volume I" and comes with a cover. It has that new school degenerated look but is done really well. The record itself has a Halloween-type skull on side "a" and what looks to be the x-ray of a human skull on the flipside. A genuinely evil looking record. (SH)

**This Machine Kills / Envy** split 7" ★★★½

*HG Fact •401 Hongo-M • 2-36-2 Yoyoi-Cho • Nakano-Ku • Tokyo 164-0013 • Japan*

TMKills play melodic hardcore with an occasional youth crew part, reminding me a bit of Shoulder. I haven't listened to music like this in a while, but they pull it off so fantastically that I get riled up listening to this. Super positive lyrics and energy from a *fight the man* angle. Japan's Envy play powerful, incredibly tight hardcore that has a similar feel to TMKills. The lyrics are more abstract but it's also a good listen.

**Design**, 7-Inch Jacket ★★★

Two thumbs up for both bands transcribing their lyrics into Japanese and/or English. Lots of grays and reds worked into a an abstract image on the front. I can't quite figure out why TMKills starts off with a capital letter and nothing else on the cover does, but overall a nice looking record.

**Treadmill** "Stand Up For" LP ★★★

*Two Friends Recordings • Haldenstrasse 8 • 73730 Esslingen • Germany*

Berlin's Treadmill play mid-90s post-hardcore somewhere between Helmet, Quicksand, and Lifetime. Although the style has been done many times, catchy melodies and vocals make this a fun record to listen to. I don't know if you can get this record anywhere in the US (I think it pressed an absurdly low amount in Europe), but it's great and highly recommended for fans of the style.

**Christian Wu**, Designer, **Oliver Helbig**, Photography, "Gatefold LP Jacket" ★★★★

The picture choice is well suitable for the general mood of the record: three giant photos, all containing water scenes of some sort. The bright, bold colors of the photographs make the design comparable to that of Shellac's *Terraform*. Nice consistency with the unusual, yet well-readable, sans-serifs. I hate to make the vast generalization that Germans tend produce a good amount of the quality design out there, but they do. Treadmill has their own font that I haven't seen before, so the attention to even the smallest details really shine here.(DL)

**Valina** Into Arsenal of Codes LP ★★

*Conspiracy Records • P.O. Box 269 • 2000 Antwerp 1 • Belgium • www.conspiracyrecords.com*

Apparently, these three mathematicians failed Algebra One. Their songs are too jagged to be particularly listenable, stop-start to a questionable degree. Occasionally, they add in (predictable) pretty parts that are generally (generically) decent. The vocals are good, interesting patterns with a sort of J Robbins type of intonation.

**Loud Grafix and Sound**, Design Firm, Gatefold LP ★★

Gate fold. . . for no apparent reason. . . photos of seaport industry, superimposed binary code, old maps, terrible script font. . . trite concepts that could have been further explored and better executed. To their credit, however, they used a great plug and outlet icon on the label of the record. (ЯN)

**World Inferno Friendship Society** "All the World is a Stagedive" 7" ★★★★

*X-Mist • POB 1545 • 72195 Nagold • Germany*

This is an exceptional band in that W/I are pulling off a style of music that few will dare touch. There is a huge instrumentation lineup going on here that creates two explosive, party sounding circus-style songs. Dramatic pitch shifts in singing, tempo changes, and great lyrics. The sound reminds me a bit of the Squirrel Nut Zippers, but done from a much crazier, paranoid, modern interpretation.

Design, 7-Inch Jacket ★★★

Very art-deco feeling. Good job with a 20s advertising feel, but it is what it is: nice looking but nothing special. (DL)

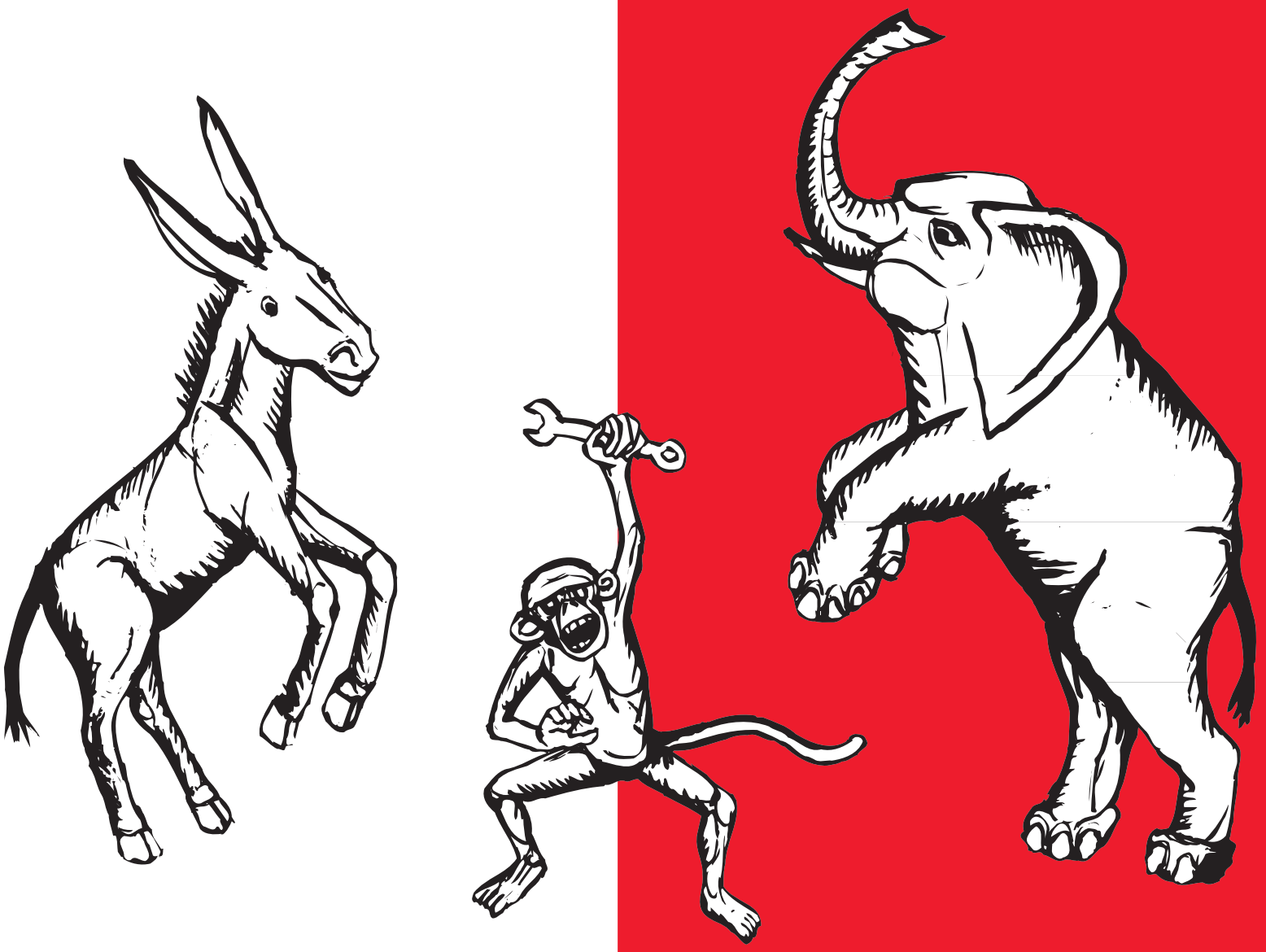
**World/Inferno Friendship Society** East Coast Super Sound Punk of Today! CD ★★★★

*Gern Blandsten Records • POB 356 • River's Edge, NJ 07661*

If you could imagine Freddy Mercury's ghost possessing Glen Danzig, but thinking that he was possessing the body of a circus ringleader, that would be the sort of demonic voice that dominates the W.I.F.S. This band is not like anything else; it is very obviously a circus band, has the anthemic quality of Queen, sometimes the dirgeish rock of the Cramps, and great, cynically political lyrics. As a singles record, it flows well and is totally listenable.

**Design**, Sixteen page CD booklet ★★

Collage and old photo manipulation is an appropriate compliment to this band's whole schtick. They have a spread of old flyers in the last two pages, which is a cool bonus, but in general, the design is fairly sloppy and the text isn't very readable. (ЯN)



# WWW.MEDIAREADER.ORG

DOWNLOAD INDIVIDUAL ARTICLES OR ENTIRE BACK ISSUES, LOOK AT THE REVIEW ARCHIVE, JOIN OUR MAILING LIST, SHARE IDEAS.